I worked in the field of labour education from 1952 to 1977. In that quarter century I had my opportunities to speak and write about labour education, as well as learning about the wide-ranging aspects of the subject, and forming some definite opinions.

There is no comprehensive definition of labour education that is fully acceptable to all. Differences arise, not only with respect to its scope, objectives, and methods, but also with regard to the immediate aims and the long-term goals. In large measure a union's educational programme reflects not only its conception of the labour movement, but also its attitude toward society and life itself. If, as in some cases, the labour movement is regarded only as a force designed to protect workers against abuse, to strive constantly for improved economic conditions, and to counter-balance the power of management, then the educational programme of that union will, in the main, stress the training of competent union technicians and administrators.

But if, in addition, the labour movement is regarded as a social force dedicated to the attainment of a better society, a richer and fuller life for all, and an interdependent world in lasting peace, then the programme of that union will include studies of a wider dimension.

Prior to the merger both congresses had labour education programmes. In 1951 the CCL had appointed Howard Conquergood as its first full-time official in charge of education, and he had begun to develop a nation-wide programme. In the TLC, before my appointment as national director of organization and education in 1952, educational activities had been a matter of local initiative. The provincial federations of labour in the four western provinces, a number of district trades and labour councils, and several of the larger unions had education committees that periodically organized weekend schools. These generally dealt with traditional trade union "tool" subjects — union administration, shop stewards' duties, parliamentary procedure, and collective bargaining. Some unions participated in programmes sponsored by universities, the Workers' Education Association, or the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE).

There were exceptions, the most notable of which was the extensive programme conducted by the ILGWU in Montreal. In the late 1940s that union had a broad educational programme covering the following subjects:

Language There were three classes in English and one in French, each with twenty-five sessions, to assist members, including New Canadians, to acquire and improve language skills.

Vocations Courses were available to help workers upgrade their skills; particularly for cutters, one of the most highly-skilled crafts.

Trade Unionism A course providing a broad introduction to the history, objectives, and activities of trade unions generally and the ILGWU in particular.
Recreation and Culture In the ILGWU such activities date back many years, in both Canada and the United States. In Montreal they included drama, singing, dancing, softball, and bowling.

Displaced Persons In addition to the language courses, open forums were held once a week for New Canadians with lectures and discussions on the history, geography, and resources of Canada, as well as on current events, the practice of democracy and similar general subjects.

These courses proved very popular, and many union members took part.

When I first assumed my new post at TLC headquarters, I began to prepare an outline covering the role and responsibilities of my department. There was no difficulty identifying the nature of our involvement in organizational activities, but I had considerable difficulty outlining, in practical terms, the role and scope of the Congress in the field of education. There were several reasons. First, I had no previous experience in designing a nation-wide educational programme. Secondly, I had only fragmentary knowledge of what other unions were doing in this area. Thirdly, my knowledge of the technical aspects of teaching adults was very limited, to say the least.

I set out to learn as much as I could in the shortest possible time. As there was practically no educational material available at the TLC headquarters, I wrote several American colleagues. Among them were John Connors, Educational Director of the AFL; Mark Starr, Educational Director of the ILGWU; and Dr. Otto Pragan, Educational Director of the International Chemical Workers’ Union. I asked them for material, including programmes and course outlines. They responded quickly, sending me a mass of literature that was most useful.

Then I met with Roby Kidd, the Director of the CAAE, and I asked for his assistance and guidance in designing and developing an educational programme for the TLC. He was delighted to hold me.

Dr. James Robbins Kidd, affectionately called “Roby” the world over, was a remarkable person. He was more, much more, than a competent educator; he was an effective leader, a willing and helpful advisor, a man possessed of a deep and compassionate philosophy and with a boundless faith and love for all. I first met him in the mid-1940s, and for almost 40 years I held a deep affection for him. Through those many years we worked together on many national and some international projects. His intellectual excellence, his concentrated and undivided attention when he was listening to a problem, his views, and advice, expressed so simply, with kindness and humility, were always a rewarding and emotional experience.

When Roby Kidd died on 21 March 1982, adult education throughout the world lost a singular and monumental teacher, philosopher, and humanist. I feel honoured and privileged to have known and worked with him, and to have had him as a friend for 40 years. Among the many tributes paid him, few express more eloquently the kind of man he was then do the words of Nancy Cochrane, one of his students in 1981:
To Roby:
Sir, you are my teacher
An ageless wonder of man,
In wisdom, in love, in full stature
Humbly living your life-long task
of learning and giving to us all.
The world over ...

When I first went seeking his help we began to take inventory of labour educational programmes in unions, the universities, and various organizations. Going frequently to his crowded files and shelves, laden with books and magazines, he began meticulously listing the names of the institutions and their programmes. Often he would make some interesting comment about a particular organization or programme. I was very impressed, indeed overwhelmed, with the breadth of his knowledge and understanding of labour education.

At our second meeting we discussed the role of the Congress in promoting a sustained programme. His advice and assistance in identifying guidelines for designing specific programmes for union members at various levels of responsibility were invaluable.

At that time, when I moved to Ottawa, there was at least one TLC organizer in every province. As in my case, their main responsibility was to organize and service unions. This they did very well, needing little guidance from me. However, in labour education the situation was somewhat different, and the organizers were expected to initiate educational programmes in their area. Because none of us was a trained labour educator, we relied on each other for ideas, advice, and assistance. Our interdependence resulted in a close-knit group of colleagues and good friends.

Our first co-ordinated effort was to encourage provincial federations and district trades and labour councils to establish educational committees where none existed. It was intended that these committees would plan and conduct programmes with the local TLC organizer acting as co-ordinator. In 1954 I was able to report to the TLC Executive Council that all the federations and many of the councils had established committees and were conducting programmes.

In my travels across the country I met with these committees to review and assist in their plans. Every programme was self-sustaining; the unions did not ask for, nor did they expect, the TLC to provide funds. In fact, in the early days, my department had no designated budget. The Congress assistance was in the main advisory, with the active involvement of TLC representatives in the area.

With few exceptions, the programmes were held on weekends, generally with two or three tool courses. They were very popular, attracting as many as 100 to a class. In most cases the instructors were officers of affiliated unions, who were always happy and willing to co-operate. In addition, the Congress worked with the provincial federations in British Columbia and Alberta in planning one-week winter schools at Parkdale, B.C., and at the Banff School of Fine Arts. As well as tool courses, these winter schools provided studies in elementary economics, industrial relations, collective bargaining, labour law, and international affairs. The
instructors were recruited from universities and government departments, as well as from the labour movement. By 1955 similar one-week schools were being conducted in most provinces.

Although our members participated in increasing numbers, the overall programme suffered from some serious weaknesses. Most of our instructors knew very little about teaching methods and techniques. In many cases the level of instruction was too elementary for some and too advanced for others. Except for the Shop Steward's Manual, which I had prepared, we had no printed or visual material. In an attempt to overcome these difficulties, at least to some extent, we worked with the CAAE in organizing several instructors' training courses.

We also began, where possible, to separate the participants into elementary and advanced classes. Getting additional education material relevant to the subjects was more difficult. We asked for, and received, material from the ILO, the AFL, and the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), as well as from some unions. We also began to prepare and print some material of our own. The excellent films produced by the National Film Board were of great value and were frequently used for instruction and as the basis of discussion.

At the time of the merger of the two congresses in 1956, the TLC field staff consisted of twenty full-time representatives, doing both organizational and educational work.

After the merger, our educational programme assumed a much broader perspective, dealing with such subjects as political action, economics, international affairs, co-operative housing, health and welfare, and so on. Concern with broader social issues increased as the labour movement faced more difficult and complex problems.

The resolution on education adopted at the founding convention of the CLC read in part:

"The CLC has embarked on a broad union educational programme designed to equip union members for more effective participation in all aspects of unionism, in its problems, its practices, and its policies; and with a better understanding of this past history, its present position, and its future aims."

This generally reflected my own view of what labour education is all about.

Shortly after the founding convention, the CLC officers asked the directors of all departments to submit programme proposals. I wanted to submit something more than a chronological list of proposed events and topics. I wanted my contribution to be a thoughtful statement encompassing what I believed to be the philosophy, the social concepts, and the objectives of the trade union movement — a statement that would serve as a framework within which the scope and substance of labour education would be clearly identified.

I produced the following document:

The aim of education in the labour movement is first to stimulate and create a fundamental understanding of our society. It considers and analyzes the dynamics of our industrial
democracy generally, and the labour movement in particular. It stresses the philosophy and the social, economic, and political objectives of organized labour. Second, it is designed to instruct and train union members in methods that will enable them to discharge their union responsibilities more efficiently and help them play a more important role in the labour movement.

Labour education is, and must be, purposeful. It is not, and should not be, abstract and dogmatic. It should stress the importance of the labour movement as an integral part of our democratic society. Its experience and knowledge, its increasing strength and growing social influence must be geared to measures that are in the best interest of the community as a whole, and compatible with our democratic way of life.

The scope of labour education is wide, and is constantly widening to the same proportion that social, economic and political issues arise and multiply. A meaningful programme of labour education encompasses the sum total of labour’s activities — its immediate objectives, its long-range goals and aspirations.

The officers accepted this introductory statement without change. The organizational structure within which the major part of this programme was to be conducted was:

- **Institutes** Generally weekend courses for local union officers and members designed to provide broad trade union education, but more particularly training in methods and procedures in local union administration, collective bargaining, grievance procedure and similar “tool” subjects. The courses were to be conducted on two levels, basic and advanced.

- **Summer and Winter Schools** Courses of longer duration, in most cases a week or more. Such schools to be designed primarily for members with previous labour education experience. The courses, although similar to those in the institutes, would be more detailed and more concentrated.

- **Staff Seminars** In most cases of one-week duration, designed primarily for full-time staff personnel. Advanced studies in current social, economic, political, and organizational problems of concern to the labour movement.

- **Industry Schools** Short programmes conducted jointly by the CLC Education Department and a union, with the courses specifically directed to the particular industry and union.

Our programme across the country developed rapidly. From the time of the founding convention in 1956 to December 1957 we conducted 160 schools in which 14,000 union members participated. In the following period, 1958-1959, the number of schools increased to 303, with an attendance of well over 23,000. At these schools there was an average of five different courses; thus a total of 1,500 courses was given. We estimated that about 300 instructors, all of whom came from the labour movement and at their own union’s expense, took part. Union officers seldom, if ever, turned down a request to lecture at educational functions. This remarkable co-operation between the Congress and its affiliates was the key to the systematic growth of the programme and the rapid development of labour education in Canada.

The school records showed a substantial turnover of participants, ranging from 40 to 80 per cent. Although the number of participants continued to increase
impressively, they still represented only about 2 per cent of the CLC membership.

In order to increase this participation rate we encouraged and assisted in the formation of education committees in provincial federations, trades and labour councils, and local unions. At the CLC convention in April 1960, I reported:

All Federations of Labour and most Trades and Labour Councils have established education committees. Regional Directors of Education have also helped to establish such committees in many local unions, and have assisted them in developing their own education programmes.

We considered such assistance to be an important element in the work of the department. The programme was, of course, not without problems and shortcomings, some of which were:

1) a shortage of well-qualified teachers;
2) the lack of clearly defined and planned programmes of progression from one level to another;
3) a failure to widen the scope of our programme by including subjects additional to the "tool" courses;
4) the lack of audio-visual and printed educational material.

We initiated a number of measures in the hope of overcoming these problems, to some extent at least. Roby Kidd assisted in constructing a national programme for the training of teachers. Beginning in 1961 a number of such courses, as well as refresher courses for those with some teaching experience, were conducted in all regions. Although the problem of recruiting well-qualified instructors was not completely solved, a number of new people were involved, and others improved their teaching skills.

Steadily we began to broaden the horizon of our programme by introducing a variety of course in the humanities and social sciences. We referred to these as "liberal education," which, for our purpose, meant studies other than "tool" subjects.

The department listed 40 course descriptions. About half were regarded as "tool" subjects and the others as "liberal." For example, there were two courses offered in collective bargaining — "Aspects of Collective Bargaining" and "The Role of Collective Bargaining in a Democratic Society." The first, "Aspects of Collective Bargaining," was treated as a "tool" course, covering progressively studies in "The Meaning of Collective Bargaining," "Preparation for Collective Bargaining," "Methods and Skills in Collective Bargaining," "Trends in Collective Bargaining," "Analyzing and Drafting Collective Agreements," and "The Law and Collective Bargaining." These approaches were intended to improve the skills and efficiency of union officers and members of bargaining committees. The other course, "The Role of Collective Bargaining in a Democratic Society," had a different but related purpose. There the intent was to improve the general knowledge of members by analyzing the essential components of society (labour, man-
agement, the mass media, and government), and relating them to the economy and the collective bargaining process.

The same principle applied to studies in the general field of economics. "Tool" subjects were concerned with wages and wage demands, pension plans, holidays, vacations, and similar subjects directly related to the economic and social welfare of the worker and his family. The "liberal" subjects in this area had a different, but no less important, objective. These studies were intended to assist the members to understand better the structure of the national economy: how it works, the relationship between wages, prices, productivity, inflation, unemployment, alternative systems, and the interdependence of world economies.

It may be asked, which has the greater priority and which is more important — "tool" courses or "liberal" studies? My reply would be that they are of equal importance, and the priorities are determined by the needs and interests of the participating students.

For a group of stewards interested in learning how best to handle shop problems, specific "tool" subjects, such as "Grievance Procedure" or "Know Your Contract," might well have top priority. But, for union members with no specific union responsibility, and therefore no immediate need for a "tool" course, it might well be that their interest, and therefore their priority, would go to a "liberal" subject, such as "The History of the Labour Movement," "What Collective Bargaining is About," or "Unions in Society." Full-time officers would generally attend seminars dealing with broad economic, political, or organizational problems. Thus, priorities are determined by the interests, needs, and responsibilities of the participants.

There are some in the labour movement who argue that the primary and only aim of education undertaken by unions should be to train members to be more efficient in discharging their particular union responsibilities. They may agree that "liberal education" is very useful, but feel that universities, colleges, and similar institutions could offer such courses more objectively and better designed than those conducted by the labour movement itself.

There is, unquestionably, a useful and positive place that universities can, and indeed do, play in the field of labour education, which I will discuss later. I also agree that in some cases university courses may very well be better designed, but I am not overly impressed with the degree of "objectivity" in some university courses on trade union issues. Moreover, I do not hold the view that labour education, in broad terms, can or should realistically be so absolutely objective as to be without a degree of trade union bias.

If labour education should, as I believe, encompass a wide range of organizational needs and social issues, then the labour movement, where possible in co-operation with universities and others, must develop, conduct, and ensure that such programmes reflect its concerns and policies. It cannot sub-contract out its institutional interests and responsibilities.

Labour education, per se, is not a panacea for solving of all union problems. The knowledge and the skills that a union member acquires through education are tools, as much as the plough is the tool of the farmer, the hammer of the carpenter, and the scalpel of the surgeon. But, if the farmer, carpenter, or surgeon is to do his.
job well, he must have strong and steady hands and use his tool with care, responsibility, and wisdom.

I hold firmly to my views on labour education. However, some labour educators, particularly in the United States, thought I was overstressing the importance and urgency of introducing "liberal" subjects into our programme in the late 1950s. They argued that other union needs were much greater. Union membership in both Canada and the United States was growing rapidly, and they felt the immediate need was the training of thousands of union officers. "Liberal" subjects, they said, could be introduced later, when more resources were available for education.

These divergent views surfaced in a rather spirited fashion in a discussion between some Canadians, myself included, and some American labour educators at the first Joint Conference of Directors of Education, held at Washington, D.C., in January 1959. Essentially, our disagreement was not on the substance of labour education but rather on priorities and timing. Those of us who debated the issue reflected the views of our respective labour movements. And so, with some exceptions, the United Auto Workers and the United Steelworkers being the main ones, labour education in the United States proceeded on the path of pragmatic bread-and-butter issues, while in Canada it was on a broader base, including social, economic, political, and international issues.