

**B.C. Federation of Labour**  
**Moving Forward: Apprenticeships in the New Economy**  
**April 18-19, 2010**

**The National Perspective – National Standards, Red Seal & the Alberta Perspective**

**Red Seal Presentation**

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**Canadian Labour Congress/Centre for Workplace Skills**

John Hugh Edwards offered comments of strong support for the Red Seal program, for its maintenance of pan-Canadian standards over the last 50 years and for facilitating a high level of labour mobility for Canadian workers in the skilled trades.

Red Seal has provided Canadian employers with the advantage of being able to draw well-qualified workers from across Canada to their work site. Workers, once they attain the Red Seal are able to travel anywhere in the country to find work.

In recent times, the power of the Red Seal as an industry standard of quality and mobility has been challenged by the provisions contained in the Agreement on Internal Trade between Canadian Jurisdictions, specifically Chapter 7 which deals with labour mobility, and by bi-lateral agreements between provinces such as the Trade, Investment and Labour Mobility Agreement (TILMA) signed by Alberta and British Columbia.

These agreements risk trading the Red Seal Standards which should be built on the highest quality to a regime in which the lowest standards between jurisdictions are accepted.

***Please refer to the short article on the Red Seal and the Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT) - attached.***

Suggested policy alternatives to the potential lowering of standards through the provisions of the AIT:

1. The Canadian Council of Directors of Apprenticeship (CCDA), along with the Provincial Apprenticeship Boards which includes representatives of employers and workers, should negotiate common standards for the Red Seal trades certification in the provinces to ensure that the standards in any jurisdiction would not be diminished by the mutual acceptance included in the AIT.
2. As an immediate measure, the CCDA and Provincial Apprenticeship Boards should encourage all jurisdictions to use the Red Seal exam as its

qualifying criteria for provincial certification. Thus the Red Seal and provincial certification would be equal and the same. This is already the case in several provinces.

Other points on enhancing the Red Seal and Skills certification:

- Maintain and enhance industry (employer/worker) input into key areas such as assessment, the National Occupational Analysis, and the development of new trades.
- Build common curriculum for trades across the jurisdictions to ensure common standards of instruction, content, and sequencing.
- Suggestions by the CCDA concerning multiple assessment tools are positive and could enhance the assessment of apprentices whose learning style is not reflected in written multiple choice exams. Development and implementation of alternative assessment methods must be made with participation and input from representatives of employers, workers, and educational institutions.
- Revision of assessment methods and tools must not be used as a tool to replace the time-based approach with competency based assessment. There is much to recommend the time-based approach in which an apprentice is given time to master elements of the trade rather than a one-time assessment of competency in a particular element or task.

### **Agreement on Internal Trade Chapter 7- Labour Mobility**

On November 19, an information session was held in Ottawa to inform representatives from labour, employer groups, and sector councils about the progress on amending and implementing the labour mobility provisions of the AIT.

#### **Background**

In July 2008, the Premiers announced their intention to amend Chapter 7 (Labour Mobility) of the AIT to read:

3. Any worker certified for an occupation by a regulatory authority of one province or territory shall be recognized as qualified to practice that occupation by all other provinces and territories; and
4. Such recognition shall be granted expeditiously without further material training, examinations, or assessment requirements.

The deadline for implementing these amendments is April 1, 2009.

In September, Brother Georgetti sent a letter to the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) Executive Council and Ranking Officers of affiliated unions on the issue which stated, in part:

“The amendments might increase downward pressure on the level of credentials recognized across Canada to exercise an occupation, since it is the government that requires extra qualifications that has the burden of demonstrating why it wants to maintain these qualifications”.

In a mutual recognition regime, where qualifications between jurisdictions are uneven, the lower credential will be accepted.

### **Current Status**

At an information session in Ottawa on November 19, 2008, it was clear that the process begun in July is still on track. The objectives are unchanged.

The goal is to enshrine mutual recognition of qualifications by April 2009.

The agreement will include provisions to allow a party to maintain a measure they consider necessary to achieve a legitimate objective which are categorized as:

- public security, safety, and order
- protection of human, animal, plant life or health
- provision of adequate social and health services
- consumer protection

### **Implications for Workers**

The main focus of the information session was the implications for the skilled trades in the emerging mutual recognition regime.

For 50 years, the Red Seal program has provided Canada with national standards for trades' qualification. Interprovincial qualification through the Red Seal has provided skilled trades people with assurances of labour mobility.

Currently there are 50 Red Seal trades which represent 90 percent of all apprenticeships in Canada.

The amendments to Chapter 7 of the AIT will directly affect the integrity of the Red Seal as a standard for labour mobility. Currently a tradesperson in one of the 50 Red Seal trades wishing to qualify in more than one province requires a Red Seal. After April 1, 2009, if either his sending or receiving province allows another, potentially lower, qualification, the second province will be required to accept the lower standard, under the provisions of the AIT.

The Red Seal will cease to hold regulatory authority and its value will be based on employer demand. At the information session, the CCDA representative said they hoped employers would continue to seek Red Seal qualification, but there would be no compulsion to do so.

At present some provinces use the Red Seal as their qualifying credential. In Atlantic Canada for example, an apprentice seeking journeyperson status must pass the Red Seal exam, giving at one sitting both provincial and interprovincial qualification. If all provinces followed this model there would be no issue with mutual recognition since recognition would be based on the same national standards.

However, since all provinces do not combine provincial and interprovincial qualification, mutual recognition risks diminishing the value of the Red Seal.

It appears that the skilled trades, who have had a more than adequate labour mobility regime, are being adversely affected by an attempt to solve perceived labour mobility issues in the professions and other occupations.

As a counter measure it would appear that an appropriate best course of action will be to pressure provincial and territorial governments to accept the Red Seal as the provincial standard.

LJS/sm  
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