

FIRST READING

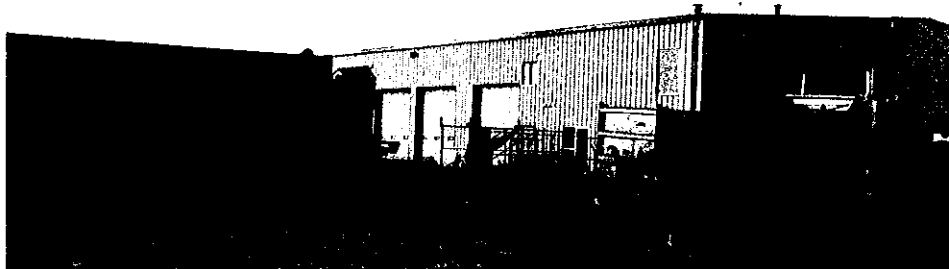
Volume 10, Number 5

Edmonton Social Planning Council

December 1992



DAILY GRIND



INSIDE:

- Are job search programs working?
- Athabascans have second thoughts on mill
- Making work safe
- Minimum wage hike misses mark
- and more...



First Reading is published six times a year by the Edmonton Social Planning Council. The Council is an independent, not-for-profit organization, whose activities include social research, policy analysis, and advocacy.

We welcome new members, or the opinions and suggestions of our current members. All membership requests or magazine contributions can be forwarded to:

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Poor assessments hurting job training programs ...Clients frustrated by system

By Sheila Kushniruk

Are employment enhancement programs getting people jobs?

Talking with about 30 clients on social assistance some have gotten into programs they've found useful, while many aren't satisfied with the programs they've been steered to. Few have found work. If they have found work it is for the odd day here and there, but rarely better than that. Clients said they weren't given a say in what programs they were referred to and if they didn't attend they were sometimes cut off social assistance, or at least threatened with being cut off.

Programs sponsored by Alberta Career Development and Employment were the subject of a government evaluation in the summer. Findings showed the programs to be 78 per cent effective, either helping the client get full or part time work (40 %); temporary employment (21 %) or getting them into another training program (17 %).

The discrepancy between what the clients say is happening and what the department says is happening is perhaps due to how each views success or program effectiveness. The department requires its contract agencies to meet a certain criterion where a percentage of their clientele get jobs.

Clients view success as being listened to, having some input into their cases, getting into programs they feel will meet their needs, going through the program and then finding work.

"I'm fed up to my ears with life skills (programs). If you feed me life skills again I'm going to hurl," said Clark who has been referred on more than one occasion to life skill programs which are part of the employment enhancement initiatives.

The referrals come from income support workers, from program co-ordinators or from other government departments such as the Canada Employment and Immigration Centres or Alberta Career Development and Employment. With the numbers of unemployed people and people on social assistance, workers are strained with heavy caseloads and there just isn't the time to spend with each client to determine what would be best for them. Inevitably some clients get referred to programs that don't meet their needs at all.

The assessment process has failed William Warren more than once. In fact he has been on a merry-go-round of referrals ever since he was diagnosed with severe depression in 1985. He has been thrown out of employment programs and treatment programs and told the programs were not for

him. He has gone through upgrading only to be told he would no longer be funded for training as he wasn't married. He has put a lot of effort into trying to get off social assistance and get work, but he's not getting any support or assistance from programs or income support workers. "I'm to the point where I'm ready to give up. I don't know what I'm going to do. I honestly don't," said William.

"They are just interested in getting you into a program. They don't listen to you. If you don't do what they say, you're cut off," said James who has been forced through a couple of job-search programs.

"I didn't feel listened to. I felt invalid," said Theresa who had expressed a desire to look at the programs available with her income support worker. She wasn't given the opportunity and instead she was referred to two different programs which she said were awful.

"There was no freedom at all for me to make decisions. I had to follow with my nose practically you know where and I have a lot of difficulty with that, so for me there's been a lot of anger and hate," said Theresa. She's now in a program at the Employability Enhancement Service, having been referred there from another program co-ordinator. She feels empowered by the program and is happy to finally have a say in the direction her life is going.

Francis was told to go to two different programs since he has been on assistance. "They force people to take these programs...you're forced to go and it's a waste of money as far as I'm concerned.

"For some people they need

a lot more help than what they get there. What's the use of teaching them to write a resume when they need addictions counselling, family violence counselling etc.," said Francis. "They don't give you an option to go, or where to go after. There needs to be an end result. You could take all these courses for 110 years if you wanted."



Clients seldom have any say in what programs they are referred to and they are required to attend or potentially be cut off of social assistance. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

If clients end up in a good program, like Theresa did, it can really make the difference in their lives. For Jim he happened to be in the right place at the right time volunteering at a drop in centre. A program co-ordinator saw him there frequently and pulled a few strings to get him into a four-week program. "I found out others had more faith in me than I had in myself." He went there for the four weeks and then the program ended. "I hated to see it end. The follow up was nil. You create a family. It disbands and boom you're back

where you started...The intentions are good, but it's the tip of the iceberg. More is needed."

Connie Leonard works on employment issues with aboriginal inmates at the Edmonton Remand Centre. She said parole officers and income support workers put pressure on ex-inmates and they end up jumping into any pro-

gram - often it's not the best choice for them. As well, few government sponsored programs have native employees, so there's no understanding of the experiences or culture of their native clientele.

"These programs are all very nice, but if you don't have the people (staff) to offer them then it's just no good...More natives should be hired into these organizations," said Leonard.

Shauna McNicoll is the program co-ordinator with the Employability Enhancement Service. She has seen the problems from

both sides having worked in the income support department of Family and Social Services until 1991 and then moving on to work for the job preparation program. "We need to stop the quick fix syndrome...I don't think there are enough programs that deal with people who have moderate to severe barriers to employment. I think the system still supports the quick fix and isn't as supportive of long term programs.

McNicol said the problems stem from assessments. She said there has to be a better system in place for assessing people's needs. "We need to not band aid people, but give support for them in the long run...You don't just need life skills or job clubs, you need a wide range of programs.

"I just think there are too many assumptions made about people on welfare...The decisions are based on what you think is best for the client. We're the ones saying what people's needs are when they are the experts on what they need. Now (in this program) we have the time so clients can have input into their directions."

Other programs such as the Options For Adults at the YMCA see successes with their clients, not just finding work, but also from leaving abusive relationships or perhaps getting into addictions counselling. "There are lots of other things besides the statistics," said Sharon Richardson, the acting director of the Options program. Tania Janke is the project coordinator of CANDORA and she also looks beyond employment to find successes with the women

•Assessments

Continued on page 20

Government declare success with job training programs

By Sheila Kushniruk

Eleven different Edmonton agencies share the role of providing employment training programs for social assistance recipients. They have competed and won the right to offer programs sponsored by Alberta Career Development and Employment. The agencies are either non-profit or private sector agencies and they are responsible for getting people back into the workforce and off the caseload of Family and Social Services. It's a multi-million dollar mandate and it appears to result in a success rate of about 40 per cent (clients finding full or part time work after the program).

To get the contracts agencies must show who their clientele would be, how they would deal with them, how many they propose to have in their program and what success they anticipate. After the initial year the agency must provide the statistics that prove the program was a success. A successful program has met their expectations for getting people back to work permanently, or on a part time basis. Success criteria change from agency to agency, but an average goal is between 50 and 60 per cent employment after the program. The criteria may be renegotiated if circumstances warrant, such as an economic recession.

Pre-employment training programs are targeted specifically to meet the needs of social assist-

ance recipients who may face personal or educational barriers to compete in the job market. The programs offer life skills, job search techniques, self-confidence building, and some basic skills upgrading in literacy and numeracy.

The department estimates about 29 per cent of people get full time work within six months, and another 11 per cent find part time work. An additional 21 per cent of people who had found some temporary employment were included in the statistics, putting the estimates for people who had found work to be between 40 and 65 per cent. That was the conclusion of an evaluation which was conducted throughout the province earlier this year. There were interviews with the department staff, agency contractors and employers and a telephone survey of about 300 participants and another 200 social assistance recipients for comparison, who had not gone through a program. Findings indicated all age groups were participating, 69 per cent were female, 33 per cent had Grade 10 education or less, 21 per cent had some college or university education, 38 per cent had been on social assistance less than six months and 31 per cent had been on social assistance for more than two years.

Sixty-one per cent of participants answered they felt the pre-employment training programs assisted them in finding employ-

ment to a varying extent.

William Wong is the director of the policy and evaluation projects branch of Alberta Career Development and Employment and he said the programs were fairly successful in terms of the number of clients who found work, but the results were somewhat disappointing for the percentage of social assistance recipients that managed to become independent of the system. Forty per cent of clients finding work in today's job markets is quite good considering the high unemployment rate, he said. However, he added, clients may find the work, but their salaries don't allow them to become independent - they still need some subsidy from social assistance in order to make ends meet.

An executive summary of the evaluation said "Statistical modeling revealed that participants are more likely to improve their employment level if they participated in a pre-employment training program. No statistically significant effect was found on hourly wage or in the number of weeks an individual was employed." Wong said there was a link between the employment training programs and the duration of employment or salary, but the link was not strong enough to give a confirmed finding. He said the researchers would have measured the duration of employment and salary for before and after the training program, but that would not necessarily prove the program affected the clients'

chances of getting a higher paying job or a job that lasted longer than their last job.

Success criteria for the agencies do not include the percentage of clients who have gone on to other programs. Wong said the department has set relatively high

been referred to an unsuitable program surely happen said Wong, but those cases have to be dealt with on a one to one basis. He said there are a certain percentage of clients that are 'hardcore' and they are harder to deal with because they resent being referred to any

programs and they aren't open to the help programs offer.

The department also evaluates the programs for cost effectiveness, and changes are sometimes requested to help bring down the cost per client. Alberta Career Development and Employment received an estimated budget of \$40 million to offer job readiness programs (about one-third of that budget is for a program which deals with clients who may not be on social assistance). Other funding includes part of the department's career information and counselling

program which had an estimated budget this year at \$5.9 million; part of the department's opportunity corps (estimated budget of \$5.5 million) and part of the department's employment and agency support which had an estimated budget this year of over \$19 million.

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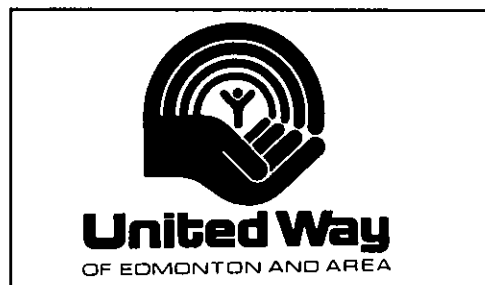
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standards and the programs are evaluated on an on-going basis.

Should agencies not meet their contract obligations they will not be approved for further funding and that has happened before. Some agencies have been cut off because of poor evaluations, or because of complaints from clients or because the management has not been up to snuff, said Wong. The last evaluation recommended more emphasis on skill development and improving the referral system using more co-operation within government departments and between contract agencies.

Cases where a person has



Mega project slow to deliver on promises

...Athabascans still waiting for Alpac jobs

With the recession any news of local job creation is exciting. It creates hope where communities are struggling to stay alive. Athabascans put their hope in promises by Alberta-Pacific to spur their local economies, creating construction jobs and then full time employment at the pulp mill. The Edmonton Social Planning Council decided to look into the mega project and see what effects it has had on the community to date.

By Mike Gismondi

During the environmental impact hearings for Alberta-Pacific's \$1.3 billion pulp mill in Athabasca, Alpac committed to hire and train 150 local people (living within 70 kilometres of the site) to fill some of the 440 production jobs in the mill. As yet, few local people have been hired, and it is unclear how many local people can expect to be hired in the next year as the pulp mill moves into full production. According to the Canadian Paperworkers Union, the recession has worked against local hiring. For a pulp mill company looking for skilled employees, it is a buyer's market. Generally, local people suffer in comparison to people with pulp mill and trades experience. Most of Alpac's top production and maintenance jobs have been outside hirings with people coming from pulp mill towns throughout Canada. One area where Alpac's local hiring has been strong is office services. There are no indications that women will be working in high paid mill jobs.

Hard facts on employment are elusive. No independent agency is verifying local hiring patterns at the mill. The MLA's

office refers you to Alpac. The statements from the company are positive: "We will meet or supercede local hiring commitments." These are contradicted by local newspaper reports of disgruntled individuals unable to get jobs at the mill, or truckers unable to secure employment in the logging operation. The Canada Employment and Immigration Centre in Slave Lake reports a three-month 'rolling unemployment rate' for the entire north west region of Al-

...opportunities for local people are drying up, and most construction jobs are going to highly skilled outsiders.

berta of 8.2 per cent in September and 7.9 per cent in October of 1992. The October 1991 unemployment rate was 7 per cent or slightly lower than today. Statistics Canada representatives caution that these rates are misleadingly low because they do not take into account the 20,000 people over 15 years of age who have given up looking for work in the region, and thus do not appear in the monthly unemployment statis-

tics.

During the public hearing, Alpac estimated between 30 and 50 per cent local hiring for the 2,600 construction jobs. Last May only 26 per cent of the hirings were local people, mostly in construction trades, heavy equipment operation and labor. As mill construction moves into stages that require more complex skills: boiler-makers, mechanics, pipe fitters, electricians - opportunities for local people are drying up, and most construction jobs are going to highly skilled outsiders. According to Alpac by October 8, 1992 only 13 per cent of the construction force were locals, and fewer still in November.

Alpac supporters hoped that the mill would provide permanent employment opportunities for the youth of Athabasca County. As of today, there are no training programs being discussed for the local high school system to feed into employment at the mill. The employment office in Athabasca reports that the real demand appears greatest in spin-off or induced local employment: low skill/low pay areas such as waitressing, child care, and housekeeping.

Alpac moves into the next hiring phase for permanent em-

ployees - trainable or lower skilled mill maintenance, and yard work - in late November and again in February of 1993. Recently Alpac conducted pre-screening tests of 1,200 applicants. Of those, some 400 passed. Interviews with 160 people with related skills and experience are underway, but depending on who is offered mill work, the definition of a 'local person' could become the focus of serious disagreement. Initially, a local person was defined as someone living within 70 kilometres of the mill site. Alpac's personnel manager now insists that this definition was for mill construction only. For production job interviews, Alpac claims a local person is someone residing anywhere in the forest management area which extends north to Ft. McMurray and over to the Slave Lake area. People in Athabasca County are worried they will lose out again.

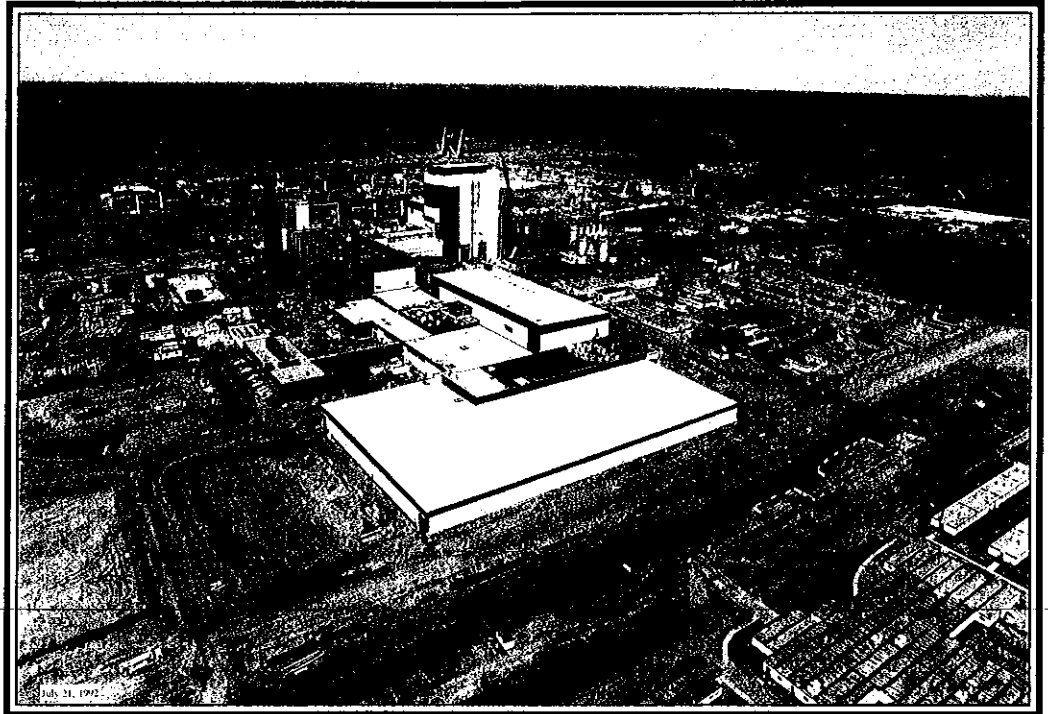
Alpac requires extensive screening and interviews because they reserve the right to hire a person that fits their new teamwork philosophy. Having technical skills, however, may not be enough for Athabascans, and those people who have taken trades courses to upgrade their qualifications may still miss out on a job because they won't pass the required attitude profile. Alpac's position is that they are in business, and it is their right to bring in the best workers.

As well, the local MLA promoted the mill and the forestry

operations as the salvation of Native people in the region. Whether or not Alpac will honor its mill hiring commitments to Native people will soon become clear. In the forestry operations, the issue is more complicated. There will be 660 'full time equivalent jobs' in the forest (logging jobs are seasonal - 90 days in winter and 90

mutterings of regret that the Government and MLA Mike Cardinal did not force them to commit - before they gave Alpac the forest - to hire and train a quota of local people.

Mike Gismondi is a member of the Friends of the Athabasca Environmental Association. He lives and works in Athabasca.



Aerial view of Alberta-Pacific pulp mill in Athabasca. Photo courtesy of Mike Gismondi.

days in summer - so Alpac averages the part-time jobs as if they were full time). Only 35 of these jobs will be permanent Alpac forestry employees. The rest will be independent log haulers or logging contractors and loggers working for contractors. It remains to be seen how many Native groups will become log haulers or contractors, and how many logging contractors will honor Alpac's Native and local hiring commitments for the other seasonal jobs.

Alpac may yet make a surprising wave of local and Native hiring, but right now there are

MATCH comes to Edmonton

Women interested in gender and development are forming a local chapter of MATCH International Centre at the University of Alberta. MATCH is the only Canadian development non-governmental organization which works exclusively with and for women in the South on development issues. Anyone, male or female, interested in joining contact board members Joyce Relyea at 492-5929 or Susan Belcher El-Nahhas at 477-5092.

Office work has its hazards

...Health and safety a concern for all workers

By Audrey Bath

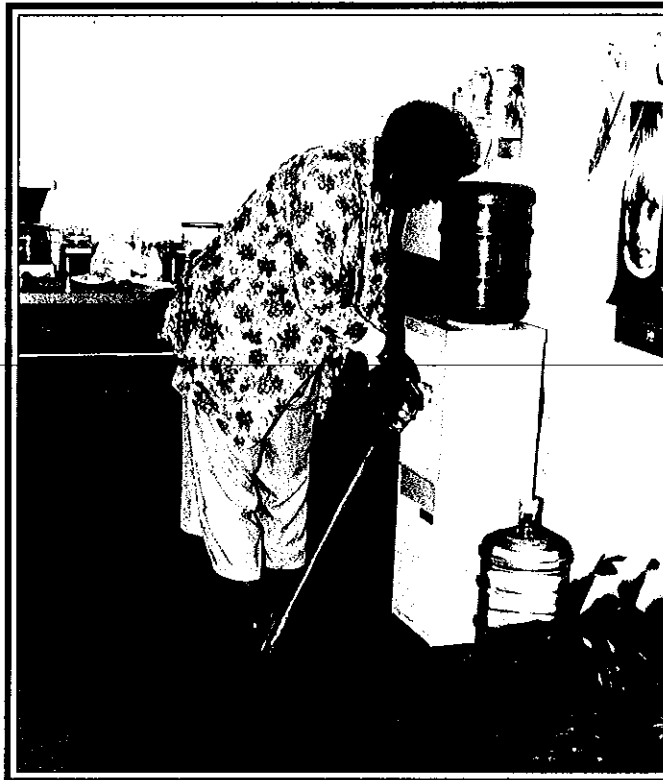
The issues surrounding occupational health and safety are as diverse as job descriptions. In every industry, in every job, both in the public or private sectors, there exists a complex array of potentially hazardous conditions. These conditions exist in a wide range of severity. This range includes common complaints of headaches, muscle strain, backaches and fatigue. It also includes acute chronic exposure to an increasing list of known and suspected carcinogens. This range also includes the horrible result of contact with powerful machinery capable of brutal disfigurement and death. The total impact of these hazards can be dependent on the length and concentration of exposures.

Let's examine for a moment the seemingly safe task of an office secretary. During an eight-hour shift, improper height of chairs and desks, office equipment, noise, poor air quality can give rise to a multitude of health and safety concerns. Multiply these concerns by 200 work days a year and by the number of years at the job and you now have a perfect recipe for a potentially crippling environment.

This environment may exist

in every office, in every office tower, in every city in this country.

This illustration defines many single hazards that may exist in the office atmosphere. It does not consider the effects of any combination of these hazards. Alone each of these hazards can have a powerful effect, but in com-



Once an injury has occurred, it's too late to make the work place safe. Prevention is the key. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

bination they will most certainly cause stress. Stress has been proven to accelerate the damage of any of these hazards found in a commonly believed safe job.

The Workers' Compensation Board, where occupational injury and illness statistics are calcu-

lated, rarely accept occupational stress as a compensable disease. The main focus of the WCB is with muscular skeletal injuries. The vast majority of claims accepted by WCB are of that nature.

It is estimated that WCB accept between 50,000 to 60,000 claims each year in Alberta. Organized labor believes this figure is greatly underestimated for a variety of reasons. Poor reporting, employer intimidation and fear of job loss help keep these statistics down. It is therefore difficult to gauge a true sense of the problem. Also not calculated annually in the WCB statistic of approximately 100 occupational deaths are the deaths by exposure to carcinogens which occur long after retirement.

One thing is certain, almost all of these injuries and illnesses could have been avoided. Careful examination of these claims reveal most were caused not by worker error or negligence but by a variety of workplace conditions. Heat, noise, vibration, production speed, poor machine layout, improper machine guarding, lack of safety training, failed procedures, to name only few of the elements responsible for the majority of worksite

accidents.

Alberta Occupational Health and Safety, the government department responsible for the safety and health of Alberta workers, once a well-funded and separate department, has been drastically cutback. Staff and programs have been reduced in almost all areas, particularly in education, research and occupational health services to an extent that the integrity of the whole government program is now compromised.

This shift in government policy has been particularly evident in the changes to legislation with revisions to the Occupational Health and Safety Act in 1983, the General Safety Regulations in 1984 and more recently the proposed changes to the Mine Safety Regulation. "Internal responsibility" has become the new buzz word and performance-based regulations replaced specification-based regulations. What this means is the employer and not a government regulatory agency is in the position of deciding on the health and safety of workers. Government involvement in occupational health and safety has been curtailed under a new popular system of deregulation. Under this philosophy of self-compliance, employers are free to operate as they wish and workers are left unprotected.

This shift in government policy reveals a basic philosophical approach to industrial relations. Any attempt to improve the health and safety of workers must not interfere with economic growth.

As a result, the emphasis on improvements, with even the worst offenders has become one of persuasion and technical discussion.

The Occupational Health and Safety Act includes provisions for stop-work and clean-up but are seldom witnessed. An air of secrecy is maintained which excludes workers.

Programs now focus on making the worker more aware and safety conscious based on the belief that workers are the problem. It is far cheaper to change the worker than to change the workplace. Blaming the victim of the unsafe workplace has been deeply ingrained in our society.

The struggle to improve the conditions of employment for all workers must continue. Occupational Health and Safety is about

"Regardless of the type of job; secretary, construction worker, miner, or professional - your job shouldn't hurt you."

protection. Organized labor has witnessed a deterioration of legislation and regulations which leaves the burden of responsibility for protection on the worker. This situation is intolerable.

Regardless of the type of job; secretary, construction worker, miner, or professional- your job shouldn't hurt you.

The issue of prevention must be brought to the forefront of industrial relations, it is only by prevention that we can hope to stop the horrible carnage that takes place on our worksites every day. The pain and suffering must stop.

Audrey Bath is the Secretary Treasurer of the Alberta Federation of Labour.

Project Updates

- Watch for an Edmonton Facts in December to report on human rights in our city. Experts and prominent citizens have been asked to provide statements on specific articles of the Universal Declaration and they will be commenting on how our city measures up. The Council is also part of the December 10 celebration of International Human Rights Day. We are co-hosting a talk by Stephen Lewis, former Canadian Ambassador the United Nations Dec. 10 at the new City Hall. Celebrations begin at 7:00 p.m.

- The Edmonton Social Planning Council is working with the business community, social agencies, the city of Edmonton and the church community to spark some small businesses in the inner city. The group - *Working Together* believes increased business development in the inner city will increase wealth, reduce the incidence of social problems and help to restore a positive living environment for individuals and families.

A small business development centre is planned for the core. This will give small businesses access to business counselling and support services.

Currently *Working Together* is negotiating for money to hire a consultant to do a feasibility study.

- A first draft of the Other Child Welfare Manual will be submitted to the advisory committee in December, with the final draft coming out in March 1993.

- The Council has received a tentative go-ahead for a project which would assess the needs of adult prostitutes in the inner city. We are awaiting final approval.

Facing Reality



By
Jonathan
Murphy

May 4, 1979. It was the usual wet, cool, Welsh spring evening. I sat in my dreary suite watching the election coverage on the television. Result after result confirmed the pundits' predictions. About ten o'clock, she was outside her house, claiming victory and quoting Francis of Assisi. I don't remember the quote, but I do remember thinking that things are going to get nasty. Why, I might even have to emigrate.

November 3, 1992. My meeting had been cancelled, so I rushed home after work to watch the results. The radio was on in the truck, and as I turned onto River Road, they said it looked like there was going to be a new president. I started to shake and felt the tears welling up in my eyes. I never expected to be so emotional, especially about a guy in another country. But they weren't really tears of joy, just exhaustion.

Thirteen and a half years. One hundred and sixty two months of job-slashing, commie-baiting, program-cutting, union-bashing, welfare-hating, good old free enterprise. Maggie and Ron, from here to eternity. Finally, they're gone.

But let's be truthful. We screwed up last time. Spent money we didn't have. Didn't work as hard as the Japanese but expected to get paid twice as much. Set up program after social program long after we'd forgotten why, except there was always a job in it for us. Treated business like it was a disease. To be honest, our way didn't work any better than theirs.

Back in the 1950's, an American political scientist wrote a book called 'The End of Ideology'. Of course, ideology never ends, but ideologies do become obsolete. North America's Two Great Ideologies died when the Berlin Wall came falling down. One of the Old Ideologies seemed to promote the principle that people should work less and be nice to

each other. The other had people working harder and being nasty to each other. Perhaps a New Ideology could start with working harder and being kinder to each other.

A New Ideology must make us efficient and competitive. It must make sure everyone earns a fair share of the pie. It must take the long view. It must provide equal opportunity. And it must accommodate our moral, social, and ethnic diversity.

In practical terms, it means reforming our social structures to accommodate the economy of the twenty-first century, rather than trying to fit the world into models constructed in the Victorian era. The following are my priority areas for change.

- Current welfare policy is a disaster. It breaks the natural link between producing and consuming. It destroys self-respect and encourages people to engage in a sophisticated form of begging. In its place, decent pensions should be provided for those who cannot work. For the majority on welfare,

real training, generous transition programs, and guaranteed employment are needed to break the poverty cycle.

- Government finds it hard to deliver most programs efficiently. Because there's no market for government goods, there's no competition and often little accountability. In the human service field, broad policy should be a political decision. But implementation must be carried out at the regional level, with accountability through representative boards, and a variety of service deliverers to encourage diversity and innovation. Government's role will be to monitor and evaluate programs, using output measurements to decide where social investments are best made.

- Unemployment is a waste of human resources. In the 1950's 'full employment' meant two per cent were between jobs. Now the government says that if one of every 10 is out of work, we're doing well. Yet other rich countries have four per cent, three per



Gabe Viveiros talks with one of the unemployed workers who congregate every weekday morning at the Bissell Centre hoping for temporary work. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

cent, two per cent unemployment, boomtime or recession. One reason is our unemployment insurance system. Whole industries use it to maintain a reserve labor force. Whole provinces survive by moving their people from a job creation scheme onto UI and back again. Year in, year out. Surely it's better to pay people to work than it is to pay them to stay home?

- Labor relations practices have not worked for employee or employer. The storm and fury of negotiation may give the impression that unions are very powerful. In fact, the wage and benefit gap between blue collar and white collar workers is greater in North America than it is in Japan, where the 'scab' or enterprise union predominates. Countries with a workplace-based consensual system of labor relations (Germany, Japan, Sweden) have all enjoyed greater economic growth and greater wage growth than the countries where craft and industrial

unions are supposedly powerful (Britain, Canada, U.S.).

- The traditional nuclear family is no longer the accepted social norm. There's no point crying over spilled milk, as the fundamentalists would have us do, because turning back the moral clock is always oppressive. But if we allow diversity, we must make it work. The economics of single parenting don't work for most women and children. There are many alternatives, including mandated minimum levels of child support, better day care subsidy programs, supported training and transition into the workforce. Whatever we do, we need to face the issue head on; we can't just leave single parent families to subsist on welfare, raising a new generation of poor, alienated kids.

- Social and economic planning must be integrated. Social stability is an essential ingredient in economic growth, so business leaders need to help stop the growth

of a permanent underclass. They have to welcome into their workplaces the people of many different cultures who now live here. Most of all, our economic leaders have to start thinking in terms of the next century, instead of the next quarter. The savings obtained in a recession by firing permanent and hiring casual are lost in the next boom period, while the resentment caused by discarding people spreads surely but quietly like a cancer.

As the new era begins, many will complain.

They will say we have sold out. That we should turn our clocks back to the grandiose dreams of 1917 or the purple haze of 1968. Don't listen to them. This time, we must do something much more exciting. We must face reality.

Mark your calendar

December 10 the Council is co-hosting a celebration of the International Human Rights Day at the new City Hall (1 Sir Winston Churchill Square)

- **7 p.m. Human Rights Awards and personal affirmations**

- **8 p.m. Special address by Stephen Lewis, the former Canadian Ambassador to the United Nations.**

All are welcome!

Minimum wage boost does not fill the gap

...Earners still struggling

By Dianne Ross

A 50 cent increase in minimum wage hasn't lightened the load for Alberta wage earners. With the minimum wage going from Canada's lowest at \$4.50/hour to \$5/hour in April of this year, little has changed in the lives of Albertans who struggle from pay cheque to pay cheque. Two provinces, Newfoundland and Prince Edward Island are now tied at Canada's lowest minimum wage of \$4.75/hour. The Northwest Territories pays the highest wage at \$7.00/hour.

"Living from pay cheque to pay cheque, that's all you can really do. It's impossible to ever really get ahead. Your pay cheque is spent before you even get it, what with rent, food, and child care" said John, a minimum wage earner.

Few of us can imagine what it would be like to work for minimum wage and survive. At \$5/hour, that's \$40/day, \$200/week or about \$800/month before tax.

"You're not making a living, you're just getting by," commented another minimum wage earner.

There are a number of tough realities for minimum wage earners. Small things like a new pair of shoes, or winter boots, or even a winter coat become luxuries that

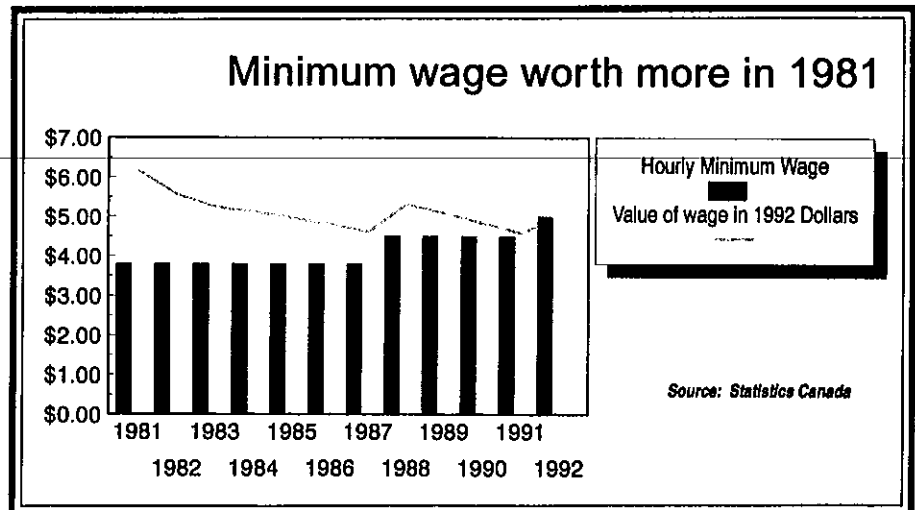
are not affordable.

"We are just making it as it is. My husband and I go without most of the time. Anytime we have any extra money we spend it on clothes for the kids or other things they need," said Lorraine. Her husband is apprenticing for a trade and often is sent home when there's no work, while Lorraine works part-time at a minimum wage job. She said that the increase in minimum wage helped

a job interview.

Perspectives change from worker to worker.

The high school or university student, living at home, is usually working to earn extra money or to put him or herself through school. These individuals don't see working for minimum wage as a long-term venture, rather this employment is seen as short-term with the prospect of a better paying job in the future. A second



out a bit, but not a whole lot. "The cost of living keeps going up, but wages don't."

"You have to budget to buy the little things like a hair cut or new underwear" said Jack.

"It's hard to look like a million bucks when your clothes are secondhand" said Killian, who was referring to looking presentable at

group that is becoming more prevalent in minimum wage jobs are older women working primarily in the service industry. There is also a group of individuals who are under employed working for minimum wage, trying to support themselves and sometimes a family.

Getting ahead on minimum

wage is almost impossible because rarely is there a \$5 or \$10 surplus at the end of the month. It is more likely that the individual or family may be a little further behind. Any extra money that comes into the household usually goes toward debts that have already accumu-

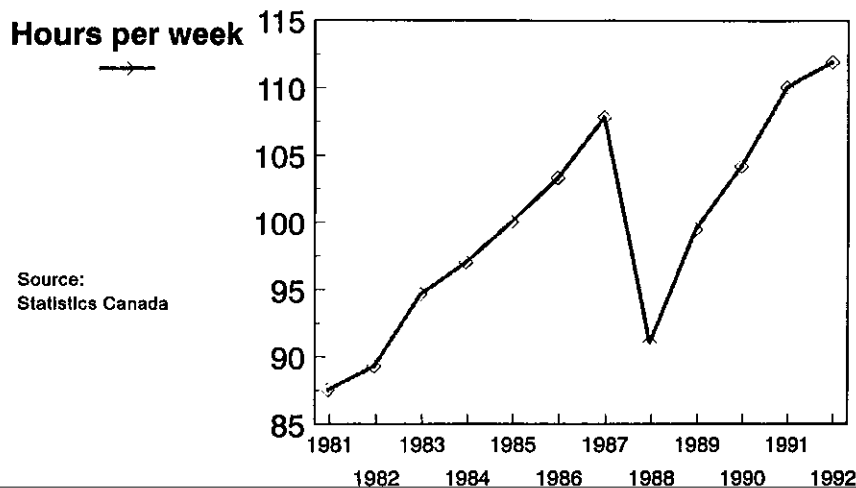
by the percentage wage increase in the province, or with the provincial rate of inflation. Then it would not require government intervention every few years to boost it up. If the minimum wage were indexed so it rose in tandem with other labor costs, increases would

“The government can’t just raise the minimum wage without thinking about the other things that are involved. The government has to get the economy going first, so there are more jobs that pay better wages in the first place” said Jack.

The plight of low income earners is shown by examining the impact of the minimum wage increase. Overall, the increase had little significant impact on their lives. They still have incomes well below the poverty line and live from pay cheque to pay cheque. Improving the standard of living of these wage earners will require more than simply raising the minimum wage.

Dianne Ross is a fourth-year social work student from the University of Calgary (Edmonton division). Dianne is doing her four month practicum at the Edmonton Social Planning Council.

Low Minimum Wage Means Long Hours of Work



Graph shows the number of hours per week a single breadwinner in a family of three earning minimum wage would have to work in order to reach the poverty line in Alberta

lated. “Saving, what’s that? Most of the time we’re just trying to get caught up on bills that have already come in. Our son has several special needs and requires special medication, this puts additional strain on our budget” said Lorraine.

“If an emergency situation comes up you can’t respond” said John.

Several critics argue that minimum wage could be increased

be smoother and more predictable for both employers and employees.

For example, using the 1981 minimum wage of \$3.80 and tying it to the consumer price index for each subsequent year, the minimum wage would have increased yearly to an October 1992 estimate of \$6.97.

Low income earners realize an increase could spell problems in other areas.

Volunteers take note

The Vitalize '93 Provincial Volunteer Conference will be in Calgary June 10-12, 1993.

Educational sessions will be in human, financial and organizational development.

For more information contact Laurie Brooks at 422-9305

Charter of Rights and Freedoms useless to low income seniors

By Sheila Kushniruk

You've got to have a lot of money at your disposal to challenge the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, but it wasn't always that way.

A local group had taken their fight a long way with the help of the Court Challenges Program. It had provided them funds for legal counsel in their argument of discrimination in government funded widow pension programs. The Court Challenges Program has now been abolished so groups like the Single and Divorced Speak Out Association (SDSO) are on their own.

The group is arguing the Alberta Widows' Pension Act (1983) and the Federal Spouses Allowance Program (1985) discriminate against people because of their marital status.

Formed in 1984, SDSO has been slowly progressing towards their goal of access to government widow pension programs. They feel it is unfair for the Alberta government to provide pension and other substantial benefits to widows and widowers aged 55 to 59, while barring other needy seniors. They also frown upon the federal government's allowance program which provides pension and other benefits to widows and widowers

aged 60 to 64. They maintain all individuals who are without a partner in life, whether through divorce or death, are realistically 'single' and no distinction should be made by social programs. Divorced and never married individuals should not be forced to rely on

as much as \$796 per month up to age 59. The federal spouses' allowance program is available to widows or widowers aged 60 to 64 and should the person qualify they could receive as much as \$740.71 per month. The Alberta government would continue to pay the



Single and Divorced Speak Out secretary/treasurer Lois Taylor and president Gwen Rendle are hopeful the group can come up with enough money to proceed with their case. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

social assistance if the only difference between them and a widow or widower is their marital status. On social assistance people receive about half of what they could with the extra pension.

The provincial and federal widow pension benefits apply to men and women aged 55 to 64. Should a widow or widower in Alberta qualify they could receive

difference should it work out the person receives less from the federal program than they had from the provincial program. Recipients also qualify for health care benefits, hospital benefits, home improvement programs, home heating protection and property tax reduction or renter's assistance.

The group (SDSO) had made it past some pre-trial steps and

were waiting for the federal government to complete their pre-trial motions before a court date was set. Now with no further funding assistance from the Court Challenges Program they have no money to cover the huge legal costs and they are stuck in limbo. The group's lawyers have told them to seek alternate sources of income, but because members of the group are severely limited financially they've been effectively silenced.

"This government has denied the ordinary citizen their rights under the Charter. What good is the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to the ordinary person if discriminatory legislation cannot be challenged through the courts?," asked Gwen Rendle, president of the SDSO.

The group was told to come up with about \$5,000 to be able to continue the fight and get the issue to trial. In the meantime the government hasn't made it clear if they've gotten all the information they need to prepare their case. SDSO lawyer, Travis Huckell, said the government is failing to take the next step and they can't be forced to do so. It's not the first time the group is caught waiting in limbo. Twice the group's lawyers had to apply for a judge's order to compel the government lawyers to comply with a court procedure. It was time and money lost.

Huckell said more money would be required on top of the \$5,000 whether the case is won or lost, as appeals on either side would most likely be filed. Any work on the case now is basically being done for free by the group's lawyers in the hopes it will go to trial

•SDSO continued page 20

Where are the ribbons?



By
June
Sheppard

I opened my mail recently and found a picture of a familiar face.

Eric Peterson is, as you probably know, the name of a prominent Canadian actor. He's become better known than ever playing the role of the lawyer who heads the law firm in the successful TV series Street Legal. In addition to seeing him there, his picture now smiles out from the pages of a letter sent out across the country to solicit donations for the White Ribbon Fund.

Along with the letter are enclosed small white silk ribbons being sent out to men in Canada to be worn in their buttonholes for a very significant reason.

They are meant to show that the wearer stands firmly behind women to help fight the violence so many are being subjected to or threatened with.

Assaults of one kind or another on women are hardly new in the world. But at a time in our history when progress in so many fields has been phenomenal; when even some of the early brutalities against women in distant lands are at least under criticism; that physical harassment and violence

against women on our doorstep should be headline news in every paper, is surely obscene.

I believe it's accurate to say that most women today in our own country have developed fear of venturing out alone as far as the post box on the corner once evening begins to close in. In fact, even broad day light is not really a deterrent to some of the women assaulters looking for prey.

A friend of mine admitted recently that she is frightened when working late in the office alone and that even if one of the male staff is also working, instead of feeling safe which her common sense tells her is true, she begins to ask herself "what if?"

Of course, a male is not automatically protected just by reason of being male. But anyone who is not aware of how confined by fear of attack today's women can be misses the irony of the long struggle for their independence;

I have yet to see a white Ribbon Symbol in a buttonhole in Edmonton but I hope there are a lot of them out there. Or perhaps many men dislike wearing symbols even for a cause they may support. Or again, it could be there are still more of them around in 1992 than I want to believe who deep within still believe women are not truly 'victims' but are just 'asking for it'.

After all, it's not too long since I wrote in my Edmonton Journal column about the Crown
•Sheppard continued
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More part time changes labor market

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is working on a National Research Grant project through Health and Welfare Canada. This project, will help us better understand the extent and the practical impacts of growing temporary and casual work in the Canadian economy. Project goals include:

- documenting the extent of the trend away from permanent employment
- finding out who is being affected by the trend
- assessing the relative benefit packages of permanent and temporary workers
- understanding the human impacts of the trend on workers and their families
- recommending policy changes to assist workers affected by temporary and casual work

To keep readers up-to-date with the project, we will be publishing background papers in First Reading over the next few months. The first, which examines the growing employer demand for labor flexibility, appears (below). We invite your comments and discussion.

By Lou Pizzi

Are the days of the nine-til-five, 35 hour work week over? Lately there have been many changes in the labor market including more temporary and casual work and less permanent full time employment.

It's a big shift and it's a trend that is affecting many people. The topic has gained much attention in the academic arena and in popular literature. In Ms. magazine, Audrey Freedman wrote, "Using contingent workers only for hours and days that are needed creates very substantial labor productivity gains."

Differing viewpoints by academics, management, employees and unions have sparked controversy and debate.

One of the most popular flex-

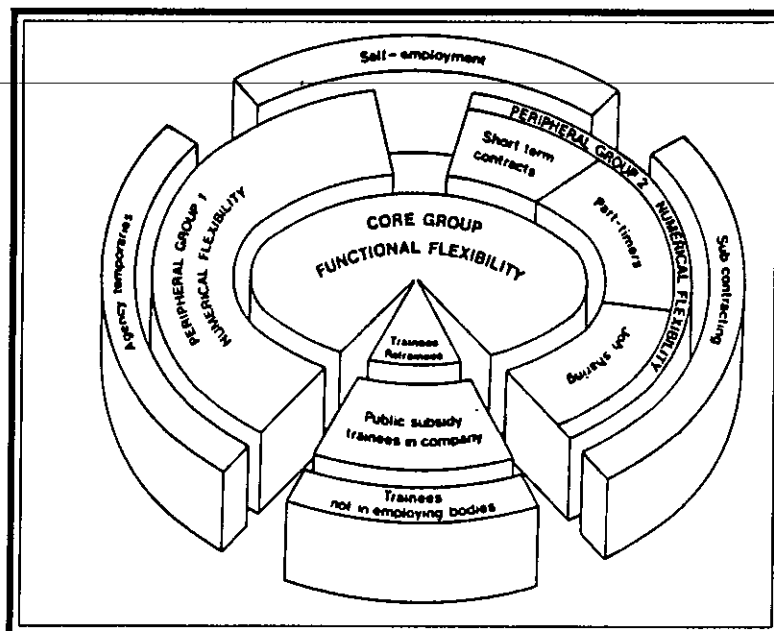
ibility models in the literature is that developed by John Atkinson at the Institute of Manpower studies in the UK. The model is based on two factors: the labor market is

ibility, functional flexibility and financial flexibility.

Numerical flexibility is defined as: the number of workers that can be adjusted to meet fluctuations in the level of demand. The fluctuations may be seasonal, or they may be very short such as in the retail or catering business. Employers will seek numerical and functional flexibility from different groups of workers (figure 1). Numerical flexibility is enhanced at the edge. The first band consists of self employed on contracts, temporary agencies, and sub-contractors.

The second band consists of workers who

are employed by the firm: Group one consists of workers whose jobs are unstable, group two consists of workers who are temporary or part-time, and group three consists of



undergoing extensive change and the labor force is becoming more segmented. His definition of flexibility can be broken down into three distinct parts: numerical flex-

workers who are in a public sub-
sidy trainee program.

Functional flexibility, on the
other hand, is the 'ease' with which
the tasks performed by workers
can be adjusted to changes in busi-
ness demands which may be policy
driven (retraining salesmen, engi-
neers, or clerks), technology driven
(the need to acquire new or ad-
vanced skills), or market driven
(transfer of labor between two
product lines).

A firm will seek
functional flex-
ibility from its
core workers.
Core workers
provide skills
that are most rel-
evant to the firm.

Lastly, fi-
nancial flexibil-
ity, is the degree
to which the
structure of pay
supports nu-
merical and
functional flex-
ibility.

Managers
find temporary
and contract
work beneficial

to the firm for a number of reasons.
First, if a sub-contractor can pro-
vide specialist experience and
doesn't have the industrial
constraints to deal with, an em-
ployer has little difficulty transfer-
ring adjustment problems to the
contractor making it 'somebody
else's problem'. Second, by em-
ploying a group of peripheral work-
ers, management can protect core
workers from numerical flexibil-
ity. Third, employers are able to
adjust to uncertain, volatile, and
competitive markets as well as

technological change and chang-
ing demographics. Fourth, em-
ployers are able to reduce costs of
labor by making maximum use of
their labor force. By employing
temporary workers fringe costs are
avoided. Employers want to raise
the productivity of the firm.

From the workers perspec-
tive, what are some reasons why
workers find non-standard jobs
attractive? For some individuals,



Temporary or part time labor seems to be a growing trend in our labor market. Photo by Sheila Kushniruk.

non-standard work arrangements
provide freedom suitable for the
demands of both family and work.
For instance, the Canadian Gen-
eral Social Survey or GSS (1989)
found that 70 per cent of young,
part-time workers work less than
30 hours because they attend school
while some older women prefer
part-time jobs over full-time for
personal or family reasons. Young
workers are more likely to be in
'temporary' jobs. (Krahn, 1991)

In contrast, however, some
workers find part-time work unat-

tractive and their reasons for tak-
ing non-standard jobs are that they
cannot find full-time work. Non-
standard jobs often provide lower
wages, few if any fringe benefits,
no stability, and less opportunity
for job advancement. (Belous 1989)

According to Atkinson's
model, core workers tend to be
male, full-time, and permanent, and
they conduct the firm's most im-
portant duties. Peripheral workers
tend to be female, part-
time, or temporary, and
they tend to do routine
work. In 1989, 15 per
cent of employed Cana-
dians held part-time jobs.
Women are more likely
to be working part-time
than men.

Some suggest there is
more variation in employ-
ment practice than the
flexible firm model sug-
gests and it is not clear
that employers use flex-
ibility for the reasons
mentioned above. Pollert
adds to the criticism of
Atkinson's flexible firm
model. Pollert writes that
the model "obscures far
more than it explains."

The terms numerical, functional,
core, and periphery are problem-
atic and "their construction into a
dualistic employment model rests
on a quagmire of confused assump-
tions and unexplained influences".
She suggests that an analysis
should recognize "there is more to
management than the control of
cheap, flexible labor.

In a survey of American
employers conducted by the Con-
ference Board the most important
element in setting wage objectives
was industry patterns in 1978.

(Belous, 1989) However, productivity or labor cost trends became the most important element in 1983.

If raising productivity is the main reason for using flexibility in the firm, a number of issues become important. For instance, measuring productivity is critical and a number of factors must be taken into account such as: problems associated with the training of temporary workers; their motivation and attitudes; difficulties in screening and hiring temporary workers; high rates of absenteeism, and industrial relations constraints. Shirley Carr writes that labor is "put on the defensive in terms of the very way productivity is usually measured, ie. as a ratio between output and labor input. This approach can be very misleading. It is strictly a numerical one; it says nothing about cause and effect. The performance of this measure can be affected by many factors other than labor, including the quality of management." She continues to write, "I urge employers and governments to look at productivity in a broader sense than just at the firm or plant. In a national sense, do we really gain much if output per worker is increasing at the same time as large numbers of people become and remain unemployed?" She lays out some guidelines for productivity improvement programs: "Broaden the definition of productivity to include such criteria as the quality of a product or service. It may turn out that the answer

to the productivity problem is to not cut down on staff, but to alter or even increase services to meet the consumers' real needs or demands."

D'Aquino writes, "I wonder why the benefits of productivity growth are still so little understood? Or why the word 'productivity' continues to be viewed with suspicion and alarm by so many? The reason, I suspect, is that we

employers who use non-standard work.

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is currently exploring productivity and economic welfare issues as well as analysing the costs and benefits of the use of flexibility. Cross cultural examples (Japan for instance) will invariably provide further insight into the topic. A couple of important questions will also have to be addressed: Can labor markets be rigid and still be competitive? and, are prorated benefits and portable pensions feasible for all non-standard workers?

According to some researchers there exists no strong proven evidence showing the use of peripheral workers is a new trend (Pollert 1989). Others assert that flexible working arrangements have been a product of the recession but will become permanent because of increasing cost



have not been very successful in communicating the idea of productivity to our public constituencies...The hard truth is that productivity growth is critical to a country's ability to generate a high and rising standard of living for each of its citizens." For D'Aquino, productivity growth includes flexible approaches to the organization of work.

There are obviously different viewpoints and issues regarding flexibility in the labor market. An evaluation could begin with a thorough review of the definition of flexibility along with a profile of the non-standard worker and

pressures and market volatility and uncertainty (Atkinson 1985). To what extent have non-standard work arrangements existed in the past? Are they increasing? According to some analysts the answer is yes (Belous 1989, Krahn 1991). Should the affects of flexibility be proven and documented, you can expect some changes in work policies. (Readers wanting to explore the subject farther can obtain a reference list from the Council).

Lou Pizzi is a former employee of the Edmonton Social Planning Council and she continues to work on this project.



Council Candidids

The Civic Candidates Breakfast hosted by the Council provided a good forum for ward hopefuls to talk with people from social service agencies.

About 150 people attended the October 9 event.

Below: Pearl Bennett, a social planner with the Council, answers questions from the media regarding the Northeast Edmonton racial tension survey



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•Sheppard Continued from page 15

Prosecutor here who suggested that the man before him who had gone on a spree of raping women in their own homes, might not have done so 'had he taken a cold shower'!

That was just one of many similar 'jocular' remarks made by men including too many in high legal positions across the country. There was a justified outcry against them - one that was led in several instances by young women in the law themselves.

I see now that in Ontario a course called "gender sensitivity" is planned which is meant to include judges as well as law students.

The Chief Justice of the province is against it being mandatory although he is quoted saying there are a few judges "whom you can't make sensitive to anything!" Regrettably, the daily news tells us they are still far from being alone out there! But then there's Eric Peterson. He can't be all alone either!

•Assessments Continued from page 4

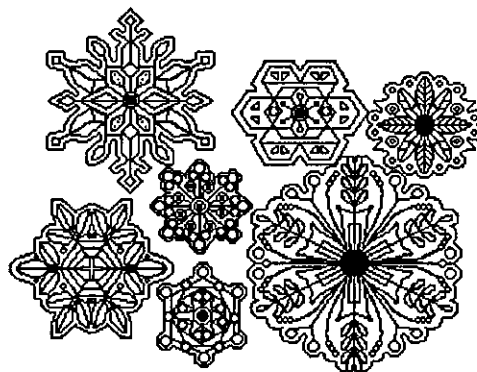
who have gone through the program. "CANDORA feels that all the women have definitely been successful and we are all very proud of them."

There's no doubt the government workers who do assessments are overloaded, but if it's only by chance a client finds the help they need, then there's room for improvement in the system and the programs themselves. Assessments have to involve the clients themselves so they are taking an active role in their own files, making decisions on directions and exercising some power in their futures.

•SDSO Continued from page 15

soon.

The stalling could well be because the federal government would be forced to top off the amount seniors were receiving on social assistance and put them instead on to the pension program. Whatever their reasoning this injustice has been tolerated for nine years and it's time the federal and provincial governments recognize the breach of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and correct the wrong. Discrimination against a low-income senior is not justified on the grounds of any marital status. Not nine years ago and surely not today.



*Seasons greetings
from the Board
and Staff
of the
Edmonton Social
Planning Council*