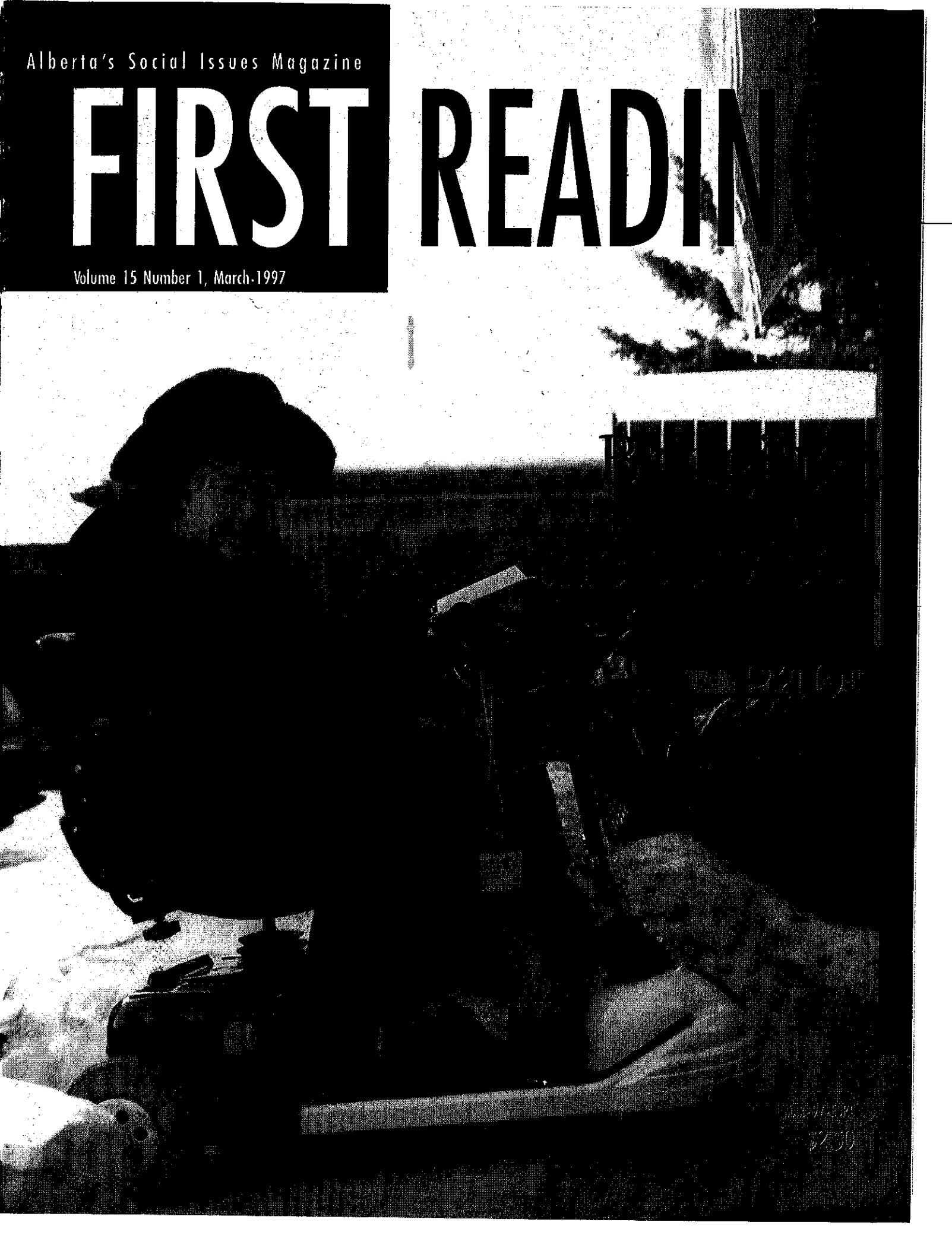


Alberta's Social Issues Magazine

FIRST READING

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SOCIAL PLANNING

Our Magazine is published four 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, and the opinions and suggestions of our current members. All membership requests or inquiries/contributions can be directed to:

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Vision

A community where all people have a commitment to social justice and shared responsibility as the foundation for community well being.

Mission

Responding to the changing political and social environment, the Edmonton Social Planning Council will:

- Identify trends and emerging social issues.
- Create opportunities to debate and address social issues.
- Initiate and support community action through research, coordination and advocacy.

Basic services like telephones, transportation and banking are essential to modern urban life, particularly in a northern community bound for many months of the year in an icy blanket. The ability to move about freely in the community, contact friends and family and generally to enjoy the basic privileges of citizenship, all depend on our ability to avail ourselves of these basic services.

In some ways, these basic public services are even more important to our poorest citizens. The ability to make the most of scarce dollars depends on being able to shop where prices are lowest: almost always on the periphery of the city where pedestrian and transit access are the most limited. Effective job search means being able to be near the phone, yet a recent study found that 46 per cent of those who use the Food Bank have no phone (*Two Paycheques Away: Social Policy and Hunger in Edmonton*, 1996). How many employers will hire someone they can't phone? The same study also found that an estimated \$32,500 is spent every month by Food Bank recipients on cheque-cashing services. With banks operating at record profit levels, can't we expect that they'll cash cheques for free?

Sometimes the most damaging effects of poverty are not the physical privations, but the profound sense of isolation and disenfranchisement. These effects undermine confidence and erode hope. The inability to communicate and interact with the community reinforces these psychological barriers.

Should these services be considered basic rights of citizenship and publicly assured "utilities," or should we continue the trend towards seeing these services as more like businesses; available only to those with the money to buy them. This edition of First Reading magazine identifies some of the problems which have emerged from our public infrastructure—problems which affect low-income Albertans and other marginalized groups disproportionately. This edition challenges us to think about the things many of us take for granted.

Brian Bechtel
Executive Director

Record bank profits, record poor service for low-income earners



There's little doubt that access to basic banking services is rapidly becoming more and more of a necessity in today's world of increasing dependence on electronic cash transfers. Utility companies are reducing access for personal payment of bills. Employers and governments increasingly insist on direct deposit. Many businesses insist on pre-authorized bank debits if you wish to stretch a large lump sum payment over a number of months. Even when you write a cheque today many retailers will not accept it unless you have a valid bank credit card for identification. According to some retailers questioned about this practice it is to enable them to put the charge on the credit card if the cheque is returned NSF. Although this practice is technically illegal, it is difficult to track or to challenge.

In the face of record bank profits, many Canadians are outraged by the escalating service charges and high credit card interest rates charged by financial institutions. At one time service fees were non-existent. Now new charges appear daily—even though according to one banking official the banks save \$15 dollars every time a transaction is done electronically instead of by cheque. The spread between the bank rate and credit card rate averaged 12.5 per cent last year—the widest spread in the history of credit cards. Given that after tax debt load of an average Canadian family has now risen to 98 per cent of income from 54 per cent 15 years ago, credit card interest rates can have a big impact.

But these problems are compounded many times over for lower-income Canadians who often cannot access even basic banking services such as cashing a government cheque, opening an account or getting their money out once it's been deposited. The closure of many local branches, reduced hours and transportation problems also affect lower income

Canadians access to banking services. And if you think you have little negotiating power with the bank, try being unemployed, an Employment Insurance (EI, formerly Unemployment Insurance) recipient or on welfare.

The Association coopérative d'économie familiale du Centre de Montreal, a Quebec-based consumer group, has been leading the charge for a number of years for better access to banking services for lower income Canadians. In 1993 they researched and published a report on Access to Banking Services and Consumer Rights. They found "the practices of financial institutions remain marked by a visceral fear of fraud and a flagrant lack of interest in unprofitable customers." They also found that banks' perceived risk of fraud was much greater than the actual risk. Given Peter C. Newman's scathing account of the banking industry's unsecured loans to major corporations in his book *The Canadian Revolution*, such aggressiveness to low income Canadians appears to be all out of proportion.

Some of the findings of ACEF's research are startling.

- 84 per cent of 220 bank branches surveyed said EI or welfare recipients could not cash their government cheques without having a bank account even if they had adequate ID.
- One-third of institutions place a hold on EI and welfare cheques for a period over six days.
- Five per cent of the general population said they had no bank account compared with nine per cent of those with low incomes. Functional literacy also played a significant role in reducing access.
- Eight per cent of unemployed people with incomes under \$20,000 a year were refused bank

accounts, three per cent of those with annual incomes between \$20,000-\$30,000, four per cent of those between \$30,000- \$40,000; and two per cent of those with incomes over \$40,000 per year.

For many lower income Canadians government cheques (pension cheques, EI, or welfare) are their only source of income and they need their money immediately to be able to pay for essential items such as food or rent. Few have savings they can dip into. Yet the majority of banking institutions will not cash a cheque without opening an account. Many put holds on the money ranging from three to over 30 days, despite the fact that inter-bank clearing rules established by the Canadian Payments Association require that items such as cheques be cleared within 48 hours. This makes any hold longer than three days difficult to understand.

A recent spot check of five different banks here in Edmonton found only two (Bank of Montreal and Royal Bank) willing to cash a government cheque with proper ID but without opening an account (the three banks which were unwilling—TD, Scotiabank, and National Trust). Adequate ID can even be a problem for many lower income Canadians (or seniors) who do not have a driver's licence or credit card. Only 38 per cent of Quebec welfare recipients surveyed had a driver's licence compared to 74 per cent of the general population.

No wonder the Money Marts are booming as low income Canadians try to make their shrinking cheques last until the end of the month. Money management is also a lot more difficult without the ability to make regular withdrawals. Lower income families are often pushed even deeper into debt by the denial of bank credit and the easy access to store credit cards (with lending rates of about 28 per cent), finance companies and rent-to-own outlets.

Do banks have a responsibility to be socially responsible? Many people think so. The big six banks in Canada are essentially secured by the government and are one of the most concentrated banking sectors in the world. They also have an increasingly captive market. If banks want the good will of the Canadian people they have to be there for ordinary Canadians during the tough times as well as the good times—and show a sense of corporate responsibility to the communities who support them, including low-income Canadians.

If you have more questions/or complaints about banks contact David Waite at the Consumer Policy Branch in Ottawa (1-613-952-8019) or the Federal Superintendent of Financial Institutions Office (613-990-7788). Copies of ACEF's full report are available by contacting Sidney Rebaux at 514-598-8511. Information on credit card rates can be found via the Internet at ><http://strategis.ic.gc.ca/OCA>

Wendy Armstrong is the past president of the Alberta Chapter of Consumers' Association of Canada, a non-profit consumer watchdog and advocacy group based in Edmonton. ■

Upcoming events

Women's Day conference

March 7th and 8th *Alberta Through the Eyes of Women: A Conference for Alberta Women* will take place at the University of Alberta. Maude Barlow, chairperson of the Council of Canadians, will be the featured speaker.

Registration is \$50 for the entire conference (\$20 for students) or \$20 for Maude's presentation on the afternoon of March 8th. For more information call 433-5454 or 492-2847.

Brown bag lunch March 19th —“Waiting for a national child benefit”

The prospects for a federal/provincial collaboration on a child benefit will be the topic of discussion for the brown-bag lunch at Noon, March 19th in the Heritage Room (main floor) of Edmonton's City Hall.

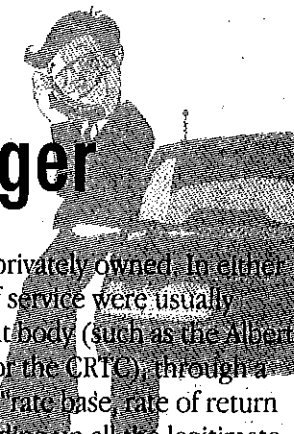
Steve Kerstetter, Director of the National Council of Welfare (Ottawa) will be on hand to lead the discussion.

Event winds up by 12:55 p.m. Bring your lunch and questions and we'll provide the coffee and food for thought!

Our AGM is on Earth Day!

The 57th Annual General Meeting for the Edmonton Social Planning Council is being held Tuesday, April 22nd at 7 p.m. in the Heritage Room (main floor) of Edmonton's City Hall. Speaker to be announced.

Telephone access: key survival tool in danger



Over the last few decades, telephone service has evolved from a luxury item to an essential service. It is now widely recognized that access to basic phone service is necessary for full participation in Canadian society, and that it is particularly important for people seeking employment, for the elderly and housebound, and in general, for the efficient and effective functioning of communities. This recognition is evident in the federal Telecommunications Act, which lists as the first two objectives of Canadian telecommunications policy:

- s.7a) to facilitate the orderly development throughout Canada of a telecommunications system that serves to safeguard, enrich and strengthen the social and economic fabric of Canada and its regions;
- b) to render reliable and affordable telecommunications services of high quality accessible to Canadians in both urban and rural areas in all regions of Canada.

These policy objectives also reflect a fundamental feature of telecommunications that sets it apart from other public utilities: that it is a *network*-based service. The value of the telephone system depends upon its universality (i.e., its level of subscribership). The more people that are on the network, the more valuable the network is. This distinguishing feature of telecommunications requires that it be treated differently from other goods and services. In particular, it justifies a more active regulatory role in ensuring accessibility and affordability to all.

The federal government (through Industry Canada) and its regulatory agency, the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), are responsible for ensuring that our telecommunications policy goals are met. With the onset of competition in telecommunications, their task has become far more difficult.

Until recently, telephone service was delivered to households by a single monopoly provider (in any given geographical region). Some of these companies were

publicly owned, some were privately owned. In either case, their rates and terms of service were usually controlled by an independent body (such as the Alberta Public Utilities Commission or the CRTC), through a form of regulation known as "rate base, rate of return regulation." This involved adding up all the legitimate expenses of the company, including a reasonable profit margin where shareholders were involved, and then setting rates to cover this "revenue requirement." In this way, companies were assured of a reasonable profit, while consumers were protected against excessive rates. Some publicly owned telephone companies, such as Ed Tel, were not subjected to this process—instead, the owner government exercised direct control over rates and service.

The privatization of publicly owned telephone companies such as AGT and Ed Tel has made a difference: the private corporations must now pay taxes, and must also deliver profits to private shareholders. There also seems to be a change in mindset within the privatized corporation, away from public policy goals and toward profit-maximization. These, however, are only some of the factors that have led to significant increases in basic telephone rates over the past few years. Even more influential has been the opening up of the long distance market to competition, and the ideologically driven policy of "rate rebalancing." These forces have affected publicly and privately owned corporations alike.

"Rate rebalancing" is a term coined by the telephone companies to mean increasing monthly local rates while lowering usage-based long distance rates. Rate rebalancing benefits heavy users of long distance (such as big business), while raising overall bills for most residential customers. Despite strong consumer resistance, it has been implemented by the CRTC in order "to enhance the efficiency and competitiveness of Canadian telecommunications"—another of the policy objectives set out in section seven of the *Telecommunications Act*. Instead of spreading the large fixed costs of the network over all services, including long distance, the CRTC was convinced that economic efficiency

requires loading all of those costs on the basic monthly rate. Hence, the \$2-per month increases that all residential customers across Canada experienced first in 1996, and again in 1997. More increases are expected for 1998.

Low income consumer advocates have led the battle to stop local rate increases, arguing that social policy is being unnecessarily sacrificed at the altar of economic efficiency, and that an increasing number of households simply cannot afford any further increases to the basic rate. In the event that further increases are allowed, then they have advocated the establishment of special discount rates for households with incomes below the poverty line. (It is notable that social assistance in many provinces does not even purport to cover telephone service. Alberta simply lists telephone service along with many other budget items that its meagre allowance is intended, amazingly, to cover.)

While approving of this "targeted subsidy" the CRTC recently ruled that current local rates are affordable even for the poorest households. In doing so, it cited Statistics Canada figures that over 98 per cent of Canadian households have telephone service, and promised to reconsider the issue if and when the statistics indicate that more households are doing without service for affordability reasons. In other words, the CRTC equated *having* telephone service with *being able to afford it*, rejecting the argument that many low income households maintain telephone service not because they can afford it, but rather because it is essential to survival in today's society.

The CRTC did, however, commit to monitoring the affordability issue, and invited "comments from interested parties informing it of the availability of any additional data, studies and surveys which could assist it in monitoring the affordability of future rates." It is important that we give the CRTC the information it needs to act—write to the CRTC, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0N2, or fax (819) 994-0218.

Competition is now set to enter the local telephone market as well. Potential competitive providers of local phone service include cable TV companies and wireless telephone providers. Many industry players argue that local rates must rise further, in order to make local competition economically feasible. Competition ideologues are thus faced with an embarrassing conundrum: instead of leading to lower rates, competition in local phone service is raising the price to consumers!

The prospect of local competition is, however, causing the old monopoly companies to listen more closely to their

customers. Telus and other phone giants are now offering free blocking of long distance calls (i.e. local service only), as well as free blocking of other usage-based services (such as busy call return, or last number recall) to residential households. In addition, they are allowing customers to pay the connection fee in instalments over six months. These service options have been long called for by consumer advocates, with no response until now. With greater levels of competition, we can expect to see even more options, including larger or smaller local calling areas, and packages of services such as Internet, telephone and TV all offered by the same company.

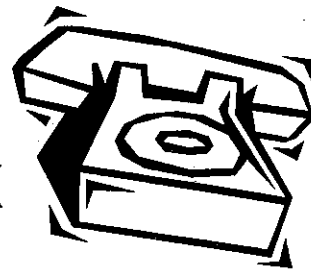
With the move away from regulated monopolies toward less regulated competition, the CRTC is abandoning rate of return regulation in favor of "price cap" regulation. Beginning January 1, 1998, Telus and other major phone companies will be freed from earnings regulation, but will have to keep basic rate increases below a certain level. While the CRTC has yet to set the cap, many believe that local rates will continue to rise over the next few years, possibly to the \$30/month level. In the longer term, competition may bring rates back down again—but it remains to be seen whether the Canadian market can support healthy competition in this very capital-intensive industry.

In the meantime, access to communications services remains a key issue for the federal government. It knows that a free market approach may well lead to a greater gap between the "information haves" and "the information have-nots," and has therefore stated that "where market forces fail to provide this (universal) level of access, the government is prepared to step in to ensure affordable access to essential Information Highway services for all Canadians, regardless of their income or geographic location." (Industry Canada, *Building the Information Society: Moving Canada into the 21st Century*, 1996).

We are left wondering how exactly the government will step in, and what it will take to prompt such action. Hopefully, not a crisis. ■■

Philippa Lawson is a lawyer with the Public Interest Advocacy Centre, a non-profit organization based in Ottawa. She has represented the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the Alberta Council on Aging, the Income Security Action Committee, and other consumer groups before the CRTC in numerous cases involving telephone rates and access.

No phone means slim chance of finding work



Access to a telephone is vital. It is practically impossible to be involved in the community and conduct a normal daily life without one. Yet there is a segment of our society that does not have easy or adequate access to such a tool—people on fixed incomes, social assistance recipients and the working poor. For many, a telephone is a luxury they cannot afford. Think of the drawbacks that this presents; you cannot phone a doctor's office to make a medical or dental appointment, you cannot answer a job ad and leave a message for the employer, you cannot call transit information, 911 for police, fire or ambulance. In a world that relies so heavily on communication you cannot 'reach out and touch someone.'

As an employment counsellor I consider any client that does not have easy access to a telephone to have a problem. They cannot call me for job leads nor can I call them—we have to arrange times to meet well in advance. Using someone else's telephone number for messages is not always useful; messages get lost or employers want to speak to the person immediately.

Years ago when I was working in one of Edmonton's large hospitals I was responsible for recommending to my supervisor applicants who should be hired for non-technical jobs. One man had left a telephone number where he could be reached or a message left. He seemed to me competent, but obviously down on his luck. My boss phoned to offer him a job. A voice answered "Single Men's Hostel." My supervisor put down the telephone and without speaking struck the man's name off the list.

People who do not have telephones must visit the job site in person and that is not an easy task without bus fare. A client related the following experience which illustrates several barriers to accessing a job and getting off of social assistance. He wanted to see if his social worker could supply him with a bus tickets so that he could apply for a job he had seen advertised. Having no telephone he called his social worker from a pay-phone only to get a recorded message asking him to leave his name and number and the worker would get back to him. Obviously that would not be possible. He pressed a number to be routed to the reception desk and

explained his problem to one of the clerks. The clerk suggested that it might help if he came into the office. He did this and was told his social worker was not available until after 3 p.m. and he would have to come back later. This would be far too late to apply for the job. In the end he left a note for his worker asking for assistance or an appointment. He had to go back the next day to the office to find out that he was unable to get a bus ticket and was given an appointment for the following week.

I understand the base rate for telephone hook up is \$42.65—then there are the monthly rental charges of approximately \$16.25 for a single line. This cost seems modest—but not to someone who barely has enough money to eat each month. Why not include these rates in the basic subsistence budget for those on Supports For Independence (SFI)? It would give a measure of independence. Telus is in a competitive market with other phone companies, surely cheaper rates could be worked out for a lengthy contract with Alberta Family and Social Services and low income people. Some would argue the telephone could be a source of problems for people who live on limited incomes because of the potential to rack up huge long-distance bills. Telephones can be hooked up so that no long distance calls can be made, should there be a history of problems, thus cancelling the prospect of unpayable long distance bills.

Other options include the rental of a telephone pager for \$20 a month. This allows messages up to 12 seconds long or will merely record the number that called. The person would still have to resort to a pay phone but at least it would alleviate some of the problems with other message-taking options.

Telephones are no longer a luxury, they have become a necessity. The telephone allows a person to reach out to the community around them, search for employment—to be in touch. It helps promote independence and reduces the disadvantages for people who live on low incomes thereby giving them a tool to use in the competitive labor market. ■

Roger Williams is an employment counsellor with DECSA (Distinctive Employment Counselling Services of Alberta).

Take Me To...Take Me, Too!

By Donna M. Martyn

The grocery store. The movies. The bank. The fitness centre. School. Shopping. Work. Home. People are always going somewhere, aren't they? If they aren't, we immediately wonder why. Are they sick? Tired? Reclusive? Don't they like other people? Aren't they comfortable in my home? What's wrong with them? It's no big deal.

When a person with a disability—especially a mobility disability—wants to go somewhere, it *is* a big deal. You see, they're just like everybody else—they *do* have places to go, things to do, people to see—but *they probably can't get there!*

Ah-hah! Probably never thought about that, did you? Well, most people don't, so you've got company. Not *thoughtful* company, not *good* company, just *lots* of it, because you're in the majority, right? And the majority rules.

Well, I represent the minority. I'm a person who has had a worsening mobility disability for 35 years. Over the years, I've used a succession of arms, crutches, canes, and walkers, and now require a wheelchair at home and a power scooter away from home to get around safely and efficiently. And believe me (as an ordinary, healthy, busy and productive person)—it's a battle!

Provided a wheelchair-user has the use of arms, hands, eyes, brain, money and a driver's licence, (s)he may choose to buy a vehicle (preferably a van) at \$20,000+ and have it equipped with hand controls (\$650) and a wheelchair-lift (\$4500+). Most disabled Edmontonians choose para-transit, specifically DATS (Disabled Adults Transportation Service) which provides door-to-door, driver-assisted transit at a cost to the user of adult bus fare (\$1.60 per one-way trip). Frequent travellers usually purchase a \$48 monthly pass.

Believe it or not, the City of Edmonton has operated DATS for less than a decade. It is now a \$7 million operation serving 16,000 registrants to the tune of 800,000 trips per year—more than 2,000 trips a day! It has expanded almost every year—even in this era of “downsizing”—and still has to refuse about 200 trips a day because budget increases still don't meet demand.

Why the popularity?

- 1 It's cheaper than driving or taxis.
- 2 It's reliable.
- 3 It's safe.
- 4 It's wonderful to have that extra pair of (driver's) hands that *aren't* busy steering or wheeling to open a door, key a lock, or give a push through snow; or eyes that can see to make sure you get inside the building you're going to; or a mind that works to get you from one group of caring people to another.
- 5 Some people with disabilities have *no other way of getting about*.

Still, there are drawbacks:

• **Spontaneity is a luxury you no longer have:** You have to book a ride for shopping, banking or groceries ahead of the actual event—usually two days. (You're more likely to get to go where and when you want if you get your request in early. The booking line opens at 7:30 a.m. weekdays and your chances of a ride are best if you get your request in by 8 a.m.).

• **You spend up to half an hour on the phone every morning two days prior to your trip—**15 minutes redialling to get through the busy signal (my actual count one morning was 265 punches of the redial button), and another 10 minutes on “hold” before you actually reach a booking clerk.

• **You must be prepared** with the exact address and location (side door, back lane) as well as specific times for going *and* returning.

• **You spend a lot of time waiting:** When you're due to be picked up, you must be ready at the specified time, but DATS does not consider your ride late until half an hour later (the “window”).

• **You may spend up to an hour en route:** Other clients may get picked up, boarded or dropped off during your trip, it's a “shared ride” service, not a taxi. One day for a 10 a.m. 'til noon meeting 20 minutes away by car, I was ready for pick-up at 9 a.m., left at 9:30 a.m., got there slightly before 11 a.m., waited from noon

Continued on page 13—Take Me Too

Re: source Readings

The Disappearance of Work: The World of the New Urban Poor

By William Julius Wilson

Alfred A. Knopf, 1996

322 pp; \$36.00

Migrant investment leaves citizens holding the bag

During one very cold week in Edmonton this January, 408 people working in four different private firms were given the same bad news: they were all laid off by their respective employers.

- Safeway laid off 241 employees of its MacDonald's Consolidated warehousing subsidiary, contracting their former jobs to a third party Calgary company whose staff is not unionized, and whose warehouse is outfitted with newer, less labour intensive stocking technology.
- CN Rail will lay off 72 Edmontonians as computer technology allows billing procedures to be centralized in Toronto; workers in similar billing centres in Montreal and Detroit will also be laid off.
- SportsDepot will lay off 60 people as the U.S. chain pulls out of a Canadian market it pursued aggressively only a few years ago.
- Siemens Electric will lay off 35 factory workers since their work became redundant after the German multinational bought the Furnas chain, which operates more up-to-date factories in the United States.

Edmonton, long an agricultural and resource centre, is accustomed to booms and busts in its economy. Layoffs and fluctuations in the economy have always been a way of life. But these layoffs were different. These jobs vanished not because profits were down but because profits could be increased by employing methods that demanded less workers at less pay, elsewhere.

Suddenly Edmonton and its pro-business city council

discovered that faceless, mercenary multinational corporations have only one agenda: to create dividends for their shareholders. Where in the past, a company would be owned by a local family or group of people with vested interests in the well-being of their community, today's shareholders move their investments around the globe at a moment's notice, even when a gain of half a point for them can mean mass layoffs for a given community.

The quality of life in Edmonton or any other city have become hostage to ruthless global trade, migrant investment and amoral technological systems which pit people against machines, workers against each other, generations against each other and communities against each other.

As Edmonton city councilors "get focused" on these issues, they would do well to consider the work of University of Chicago sociologist William Julius Wilson. Wilson is the author of *The Disappearance of Work: The World of the New Urban Poor*, a book that documents the devastating effect of this new, global corporate regime and its resulting jobless economy, particularly amongst some of the most vulnerable populations in America.

Wilson studied disadvantaged inner city, majority black neighborhoods in his 1987-88 Urban Poverty and Family Life Study. These neighborhoods had historically recorded lower income levels than outlying communities with a majority of white residents. Wilson observes that through the 1970s and 80s, racist right-wing and liberal commentators alike focused on race as a primary factor for the impoverished condition of inner

city residents. Racists would invoke the notion of cultural or even genetic inferiority on the part of the residents. Liberals, including radical black activists, isolated racial discrimination as the main reason inner cities were mired in poverty.

But this debate masked the real reasons for urban poverty, which Wilson believes to be the exodus of traditional employers from the industrial cores of northern U.S. cities to suburban "edge cities" and foreign countries with lower standards for wages and working conditions.

This shift stranded millions of Afro-Americans whose ancestors were attracted to the industrial work in the north after abolition.

In just 25 years, Wilson has seen neighborhoods like Chicago's North Lawndale deteriorate into a "war zone," as Western Electric, Sears-Roebuck, Sunbeam, Zenith, Dell Farm and Harvester closed offices and factories and moved ten of thousands of jobs out of the city, out of the state and even out of the country.

"The departure of the big plants triggered the demise or exodus of the smaller stores, the banks, and other businesses that relied on the wages paid by the large companies," Wilson writes. The 1968 riots in reaction to the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. provided more immediate impetus for business to leave the neighborhood. By 1986, "North Lawndale, with a population of over 66,000, had only one bank and one supermarket; but it was also home to forty-eight lottery agencies, fifty currency exchanges, and ninety-nine licensed liquor stores."

To put this example in perspective, 66,000 also happens to be the number of people who work in Edmonton's downtown core. Imagine all of these workers as unemployed residents, and that the only businesses left are casinos, private liquor stores and money marts.

Like Edmonton, Chicago had a strong manufacturing sector, a sector which is particularly vulnerable as jobs are irrevocably replaced by machines, or relocated to superplants elsewhere in the country, or even overseas. What jobs remain are technologically advanced and demand a highly specialized level of expertise.

"The manufacturing losses in some northern cities have been staggering," Wilson writes. "In the twenty-year period from 1967 to 1987, Philadelphia lost 64 percent of its manufacturing jobs; Chicago lost 60 percent; New York City, 58; Detroit, 51 percent. In absolute numbers, these percentages represent the loss of 160,000 jobs in

Philadelphia, 326,000 in Chicago, 520,000—over half a million—in New York, and 108,000 in Detroit."

The job opportunities are superficially better for workers in the growing retail, clerical and social services sectors in the U.S. But these are industries which employ women at two-thirds the average wage for men. In addition, retail and clerical work has increasingly been parceled out in part-time, just-in-time or temporary bites, with little to nothing in the way of benefits or security. As in Canada, the social services sector is vulnerable to the political winds. And private U.S. hospitals, clinics and other social service sites are not unionized or high paying.

Communities suffer from the loss of work. Wilson details how joblessness engenders the rise of illegitimate "work", such as drugs or prostitution, how a diminished local tax base erodes education and health programs for children and how the absence of legitimate means by which an individual live independently ultimately destroys the basic tenants of a healthy community.

"...[W]ork is not simply a way to make a living and support one's family, it also constitutes a framework for daily behaviour and patterns of interaction because it imposes disciplines and regularities," Wilson writes. "Thus, in the absence of regular employment, a person lacks not only a place in which to work and the receipt of regular income but also a coherent organization of the present—that is, a system of concrete expectations and goals.... In the absence of regular employment, life, including family life, becomes less coherent. Persistent unemployment and irregular employment hinder rational planning in daily life, the necessary conditions of adaptation to an industrial society."

Everyday, people working in corporate offices around the globe make decisions which will increase dividends to faceless shareholders. They may decide to increase profits by replacing people with machines, or by taking advantage of relaxed international investment and workplace regulations by moving jobs permanently out less lucrative and less glamorous places like North Lawndale, Illinois, or Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, for that matter. Faced with ever diminishing tax bases and decreasing provincial and federal allotments, places like North Lawndale and Edmonton are left holding the bag, and all citizens are left materially and societally poorer for it. ■

Suzette C. Chan is an Edmonton writer. She is also the Administrative Assistant at the Edmonton Social Planning Council.



Securing our working future

Concerns about the future of work are as old as economic change itself. However, there are periods when technological innovation and economic restructuring are particularly rapid and profound. We believe that future historians will characterize the last two decades of the 20th century as such a period, when we searched for new social arrangements to catch up with an economy in which all the rules suddenly seem to have changed. It is this combination of rapid changes in the labor market and weakened collective institutions that fuels the current debate over the future of work.

In our view, the starting point for interpreting this debate is the economic anxiety that now seems so pervasive. This anxiety includes a generalized angst about the future of the country, the solvency of our governments and a widening gulf between “haves” and “have-nots.” We believe that the anxiety being experienced by Canadians is a reaction to six disturbing long-range trends in the labor market:

- the persistently high levels of unemployment;
- underemployment, especially among young people;
- the uncertainties stemming from the growth of nonstandard work;
- polarization, especially the resulting marginalization of poorly-educated and unskilled individuals;
- the earnings stagnation that has stalled improvements in living standards for many workers and families; and
- new management strategies that have fuelled uncertainty and altered the balance of power in many workplaces.

The peril associated with recent economic and technological restructuring has been increasingly borne by individual Canadians and their families. Cornerstone institutions from the past half-century that minimized individual risk—the social safety net, stable employment “contracts,” unions and collective bargaining—have all weakened during the 1980s and 1990s. As these old “anchors” have become less effective, nobody has invented new ones to replace them.

The challenge now is to invent new “anchors” (or modernize old ones) which can strengthen the capacity of individuals to adapt to change and which provide more appropriate collective security. Without meaningful anchors, we face the prospect of ongoing polarization, of social exclusion and fragmentation, and of an economy that is stunted by underutilizing its human resources, a depressed consumer base, and large numbers of people who will resist change even when it really does represent progress.

In devising new institutions, policies and behavioural patterns for the post-industrial economy, Canadians will have to make difficult decisions about the type of society they want. Needed is a complete re-thinking how we distribute opportunities, jobs, income and security.

Canadians of all ideological persuasions should be concerned about these distributional issues. On an economic level, there are serious costs to society when a substantial portion of the population is not fully participating economically or socially. Social polarization increases. Resources are underutilized and consumer demand is depressed. As well, marginalization forces society to spend a great deal on “defensive” policies, including social assistance, policing and correctional services.

In other words, a healthy social system almost certainly contributes more to a healthy economy than is acknowledged by the mainstream thinking among business leaders, many economists and policy-makers. Social cohesion is threatened when large numbers are, in effect, excluded from the mainstream of society. Canadians seem to understand this problem, as shown in public opinion polls indicating concerns about our society becoming one of haves and have-nots.

So a key step in developing institutional “anchors” for the 21st century will be to achieve a consensus regarding distribution and social security. In the implicit “social contract” of the post-war era, a high priority was attached to these concerns and the result was the creation of an extensive social safety net. Clearly this safety net will not exist in the future as it did in the past,

yet the problems that it addressed have not disappeared and, in fact, may be growing.

The choices we make in this regard—for example, how to provide social insurance, to support the poor, to protect employees' rights in the workplace, and to enable communities to respond to changing needs—will be determined by two things. One is our collective understanding of the costs and benefits of attempting to reshape market outcomes to achieve these goals. There is widespread agreement that the safety net of the past quarter-century now is too costly and ineffective, but there may be alternative approaches that yield a better “cost-benefit” ratio. The other determining factor, ultimately the most critical, will involve societal values and the priority we attach to distributional and social security issues.

There are also important questions about how work should be distributed. This has many dimensions: between paid and unpaid work; the allocation of hours across the workforce; how work is spread over the life-course. How we choose to distribute work has important implications for the economy, for job security and income distribution, and for the quality of life.

Given the growing dissatisfaction with current arrangements, in coming years we must devise alternatives. This agenda will have to address questions such as the following: Should compensation and benefits—for example, insurance or pensions—be contemplated for unpaid work? Are there ways to more evenly distribute work time across the adult population, including across age groups? What are the prospects for worksharing, limitations on overtime, and a shorter work week? Also, are there arrangements that could be considered to ease the currently sharp transition from work to retirement? There will be substantial social and economic benefits from a better distribution of working time along these dimensions.

Debates around the future of work tend to be infused with a sense of inevitability—either utopian or apocalyptic. However, this does not accurately represent the historical process. People shape their society through individual and collective action. To a considerable degree, Canadians themselves will determine the future of work in this country. We will do this through the process whereby employers and employees reinvent the rules of the workplace. And we will do this through the directions we give governments in setting national priorities and making public investments. These choices will shape the kind of

society in which we live and work after the millennium.

Gordon Betcherman is Director of the Work Network at the Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. in Ottawa and Graham Lowe is a sociologist at the University of Alberta. This article is adapted from their The Future of Work: A Synthesis Report recently published by the Canadian Policy Research Networks Inc. Copies are available from Renouf Publishing Co., 5369 Canotek Road, Ottawa, ON, K1J 9J3. Tel: 613 745-2665 / Fax 613 745-7660. The cost is \$9.95 (plus GST and postage).



Take Me Too—Continued from page 9

until 12:30 p.m. for the ride home, after which we had two more pick-ups and one drop-off before I got home at 2:30 p.m. No lunch and no accessible bathroom for over five hours! An endurance test—for the disabled?

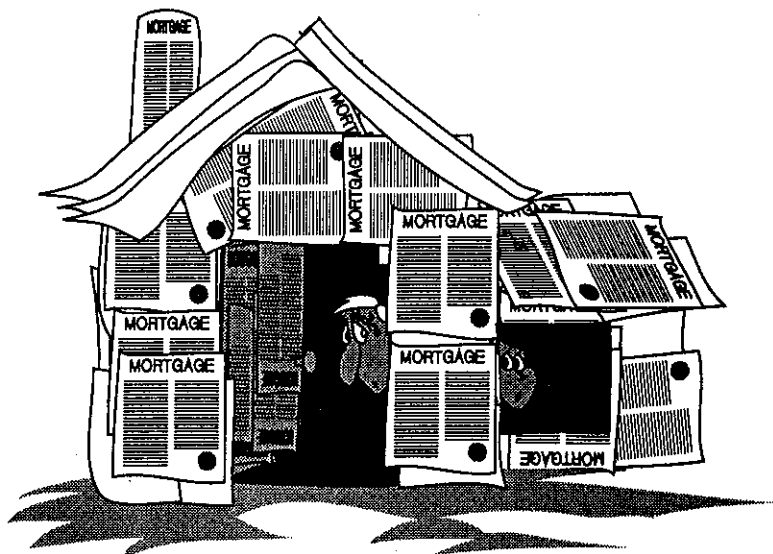
- If your ride is late, **you can't leave** for a drink or a telephone call or you might miss it, you also can't take another mode of transportation (if there is another choice) because if you routinely aren't there for a scheduled trip you may be suspended from the system, and then what do you do?

- Before 6 a.m. and after 10:30 p.m. weekdays (before 7 a.m. and after midnight on Friday and Saturday) there is **no service**, so you can't handle a job, school or social engagement that might have time requirements at night.

The City is trying to increase the options: LRT trains are being equipped with ramps, and Edmonton is gradually replacing its aging transit fleet with new **low-floor buses**, which have two wheelchair/scooter slots each, so DATS users who are able can use regular transit. But a new bus costs nearly \$175,000, so the phase-in will take 10 years. There are currently about 55 in use (less than seven per cent), so few routes are covered as yet. And until we clear snow better, in winter potential users can't get down the sidewalk or cross the street to the bus stop.

Bottom line? The City provides the best, least expensive, safest, and most efficient service for citizens with disabilities (it operates \$2-\$3/ride cheaper than Calgary, for example). About 30 per cent of the disabled are unemployed and most are poor. But with taxpayers unwilling to see an increase in taxes, there is growing danger that people with disabilities will be further marginalized simply because they can't even get to a doctor, school, church, work or grocery store. ■

Donna Martyn is a school teacher with the Edmonton Public School Board, and currently chairs the City of Edmonton Advisory Board on Services for Persons With Disabilities.



Accessing a *last resort*

I am one of the many people who have joined the ranks of the unemployed—my last job was a contract position. My employer managed to extend my position for an additional month, but due to lack of funding my position was terminated.

Unemployment Insurance (UI), now called Employment Insurance (EI), worked closely with me. Meetings with an EI counsellor, job searches, regular checks on the number of job applications, (I was sending three to five per day), EI training programs failed. My EI counsellor and I finally agreed more training was required. In February, 1997 I will return to school on a student loan.

On December 20, 1996 my EI payments ended. With no income due until February it became clear welfare was my only hope. Ashamed and depressed I headed for the nearest Supports For Independence (SFI, or welfare) office. This was my experience.

Day one: I stood in line. Five minutes later my category was determined to be single employable. I was given an application package containing information on required documents, how to prepare for the intake interview, a paper for clients waiting for EI benefits explaining benefits may have to be paid back, the application form, an employment history form and a rent report form for the landlord to complete.

Day two: I returned to SFI office with all the required documents completed and was asked to return at 1 p.m. as there were people waiting ahead of me.

Once back at SFI my application package was examined and I was told to have a seat until my name was called.

Two and one-quarter hours later I was called to another window. My identification was photocopied, my application was examined a second time, signed and I was

told to return the following day to attend an information session.

Day three: The session included me and 10 other individuals. First on the agenda—how to fill out the information package. At this point I asked myself why we were wasting funds and time on documents that have already been completed and signed as acceptable. I am not sure which comes first the chicken or the egg, but I am sure the session should come before the package approval.

Applications aside, my group was told new rules had recently been implemented via fax to each SFI office. The worker explained this section would make some of us angry and although the worker did not say she agreed with the rules, she did say any severe outbursts would not be tolerated and would be met with a call to the police or 911. At this point each group member was handed a paper entitled Job Search Agreement. The paper had a list of three agencies who offer job search skills, telephone and interview techniques. It stated clients would be provided with job leads and a job consultant to assist with the job search. Each agency's program runs two weeks and the agreement stated the client must pick one agency and attend the program. The worker then explained that at the end of the program the client could return to the SFI office with proof of program completion (supplied by the agency) and then an appointment could be made to talk to an intake worker about receiving social assistance. This appointment would follow approximately two weeks after the job search program—meaning it would be at least a month before we would be approved or denied for SFI benefits. The job search agreement was to be signed and dated by the individual and the worker.

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A fractured community

The Boyle-McCauley area is densely populated with unemployed singles who live in boarding houses, many families, and disabled people who, because of limited incomes, find it cheaper to live here than in other areas of Edmonton. But "cheaper" does not mean a good quality of life for many area residents. "Healthy" community is not often used to describe the Boyle-McCauley area, though steps are being made to improve this image by area outreach programs by the Bissell Centre, Boyle Street Coop, the Boyle McCauley Health Centre and other charitable organizations. One of the major problems found in the area relates to access to services immediately outside the community. Some of the area people are illiterate and unskilled for the high-tech jobs demanded by modern society. So, in a real sense, their limitations force them to live in this low-income area. They traverse a limited trapline.

Take employable singles on welfare, for example. People who really want to work but have few skills to offer and who, for various reasons (mostly pride), do not want to take an "up-grading" program. They are pretty much forced to look for employment within the area—casual labor is about they can access. A trip to Canada Place scares them because it's all computerized and they don't want to admit ignorance of the machines that frighten them. The bulk of low-income employables do not have a bus pass because they cannot afford one, unless they dip into the food and clothing portions of their welfare allowance. This means they cannot travel to employer sites in the industrial areas of town. Thus they are "forced" to take sporadic minimum wage day jobs, which do little to better their situations.

Too, because of limited income, many area residents cannot afford a telephone. So they trek a few blocks up the street to a pay phone or use the free daytime telephone services provided by community organizations. But what happens at night? During emergencies? During crises?



Travel is also a bother for disabled people in the neighborhood. Take Lloyd who has been blind for 20 years and survives on Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH). He has a seeing-eye German shepherd both as company and life-saver. With the recent construction to revitalize the area, he's had to reprogram his walking activities around the inner city.

"Most people don't realize blind people have to memorize the inner-city trails they travel," says Lloyd.

"What with this recent ARP (Area Re-development Plan), it's been hell walking around here. Wooden barriers, mounds of mud, sidewalks disappearing, new ones showing up—all these things make travelling a torment for people like me. I'm pretty much trapped in my suite in the winter, what with the icy sidewalks that go unsanded by the City or residents. At crossings, I have to rely on my dog or friendly people to make sure I cross with my life safe. There's no beeping signals to let you know the light is green. And there are a lot of crazy drivers on 97 St. or 95 St. Sometimes I get a case of cabin fever, being forced to stay in and all. But that's part of the cost of being disabled."

There are other costs for the disabled and the poor who live in the inner city. Because most of the area poor do not drive they are forced to be a "walking community". This presents problems for people who need to get to a medical centre. Apart from the Boyle McCauley Health Centre, the closest hospital, the Royal Alexander, is half a mile away—a minimum 30-minute walk.

As many residents are reluctant to shop at stores which specialize in selling foods from other cultures, they are dependent on only two stores: the Lucky 97 or the Highland-based grocereria off Jasper Avenue. Most healthy residents can get their groceries home by "borrowing" a shopping buggy to wheel the food home. But shut-ins and seniors find they must travel miles by public transit or taxi to the closest Safeway, on 116th Avenue. A trip to the nearest Superstore is outside of

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A question period then followed. One man said he agreed with the employment program and thought it was a good idea to get people moving. However, he pointed out that he did not need the program. He knew how to write a resume—in fact, though currently unemployed and waiting for EI payments, he had already found a new job that would start in one month. He needed assistance to cover the one month without income. He asked what about people like himself who needed immediate help and who will be paying back the welfare amounts through deductions to his EI cheques? The worker explained that there are many "grey" areas within the system. There were some ways around these grey areas, but the man would still have to follow the job agreement.

I provided the next questions: I explained I was returning to school in February and that I have experience in job training programs and my resume is of professional quality. I said I would be in school by the time my intake interview was to take place (in approximately five weeks). The worker explained that knowing this, I would probably not qualify for assistance. My next question—"What am I supposed to do for one month?" The worker replied, "Do what you can."

I then asked the worker if this was an attempt to dismantle Alberta's social safety net. The worker replied it is a deterrent. In the end eight out of the 11 individuals in the group fell into 'grey' areas.

As I made my way home my thoughts took many forms. I will manage somehow, but what about those who came to SFI as a last resort? I was under the assumption SFI was designed as a last resort for people in transition, so what happens when programs fail the people they are designed to serve? Why would the provincial government take such steps with an election coming up? What does this tell us about our government's attitude toward poverty? Even more frightening, what message does this send in regards to our society's tolerance of these attitudes? ❏

Janice Lonsdale is currently taking a computer course to upgrade her social work skills.

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their travel budget, and so they miss the deals enjoyed by other Edmontonians.

There are no banks within the inner city, so again, residents must walk or taxi to the closest financial institution.

Apart from the community league bingos or suppers, there is little in the way of entertainment other than banding together to accept with a laugh the miseries presented by life on a daily basis.

The real bug-bears in the area are lack of employment opportunities within the district, lack of local training programs for interested employables and a lack of a life outside the walking parameters of the individual. In a sense, poor inner city residents like the "bubble existence" described by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre.

The lack of local employment, accessible services and neighborhood activities isolates the community and its individual members. Some things in life are not free. Quality of life has to be paid for. But unless it is available within the reach, poor inner city residents remain fractured and excluded from the mainstream of society. ❏

Tom Hind is an Edmonton freelance writer and former assistant editor of Our Voice (Spare Change newspaper).

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