Alberta's Social Issues Magazine

FIRST READING

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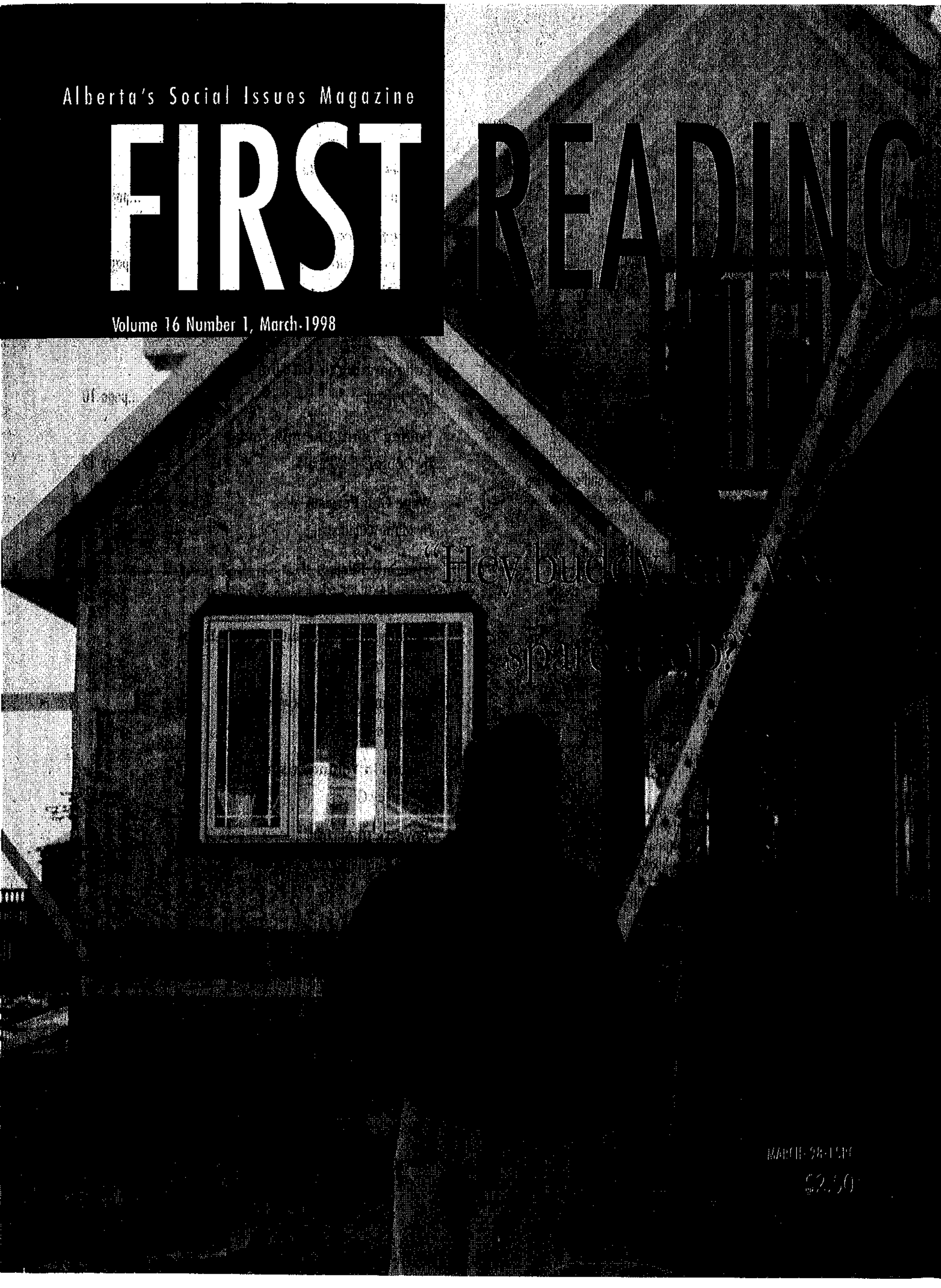

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SOCIAL PLANNING
council

First Reading 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 magazine contributions can be forwarded to:

Edmonton Social Planning Council
Suite 41, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, Alberta T5K 1C5
Tel. 403.423.2031 Fax 403 425.6244
e-mail>edmspc@compusmart.ab.ca
Homepage>http://www.compusmart.ab.ca/espc

We reserve the right to edit all contributions.

Managing Editor: Brian Bechtel

Editor: Sheila Hallett-Kushniruk

Contributors: Alvin Finkel, Lori Nagy and Bill Rice, Suzette C. Chan, Paul Cabaj, Dougal MacDonald, Mimi Williams, Dr. Gurcharn Basran and Dr. Li Zong, Theresa McBryan, Bruce O'Hara, Tracey Geyer, Midge Cuthill and Deana Shorten.

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PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

Inside you'll find...

Vision

A community where all people have a commitment 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.

After testing the waters on abolishing Alberta's minimum wage, Alberta Labour has instead opted to conduct a review of Employment Standards Regulation which includes Alberta's minimum wage. The province-wide survey is to be completed by March 31, 1998, but the review process is not expected to be completed until the spring of 1999. This announcement came on January 15, 1998 from the Minister of Labour, Murray Smith.

"This public review is reflective of the Government's commitment to ensuring that regulations continue to be effective and appropriate," said Smith.

Alberta's minimum wage is $5 an hour for adults and $4.50 an hour for students under the age of 18. This is the lowest of all Canadian provinces. In the questionnaire survey respondents are asked: "Should Alberta have a minimum wage" and if so, "Is the current minimum wage appropriate?"

Information collected from the survey may suggest much-needed changes to the Employment Standards Regulations but these changes would have to fit within the policy of the government and with other legislation. In the meantime workers earning minimum wage can look forward to another year of $5 an hour wages (which amounts to about $840 a month before taxes). This wage ensures the Department of Family and Social Services will continue to have many clients who will require supplemental money to pay rent, pay utilites and buy food for themselves and their family. It will also go a long way to ensuring the increasing use of food banks. It could be argued that the Alberta government is subsidizing employers who do not pay a living wage—employers who continue to benefit by being allowed to pay ridiculously low wages, but of course the questionnaire does not address any of these concerns.

If parts of the survey produce widely-varying responses, then further public consultation may be sought. We urge you to speak up on this issue by completing a copy of the Employment Standards Regulations questionnaire. To receive a copy you can contact: Alberta Labour, Employment Standards (403)422-3311 (toll-free by dialing 310-0000 then entering the seven-digit number) or fax: 427-6693. You can also obtain the package at any Alberta Labour office, any MLA constituency office or by connecting to the Alberta Labour homepage http://www.gov.ab.ca/~lab or via e-mail: esreview@lab.gov.ab.ca

This issue of First Reading looks at a few aspects of employment: unionization, careers for the next century, youth unemployment, wage gaps between the sexes, systemic racism and alternative employment strategies. Wages are a central issue within each of these topics—too bad Alberta's working poor people will have to wait at least one year before the government will address the issue of a living wage.

Why Alberta's Rate of Unionization is Canada's Lowest

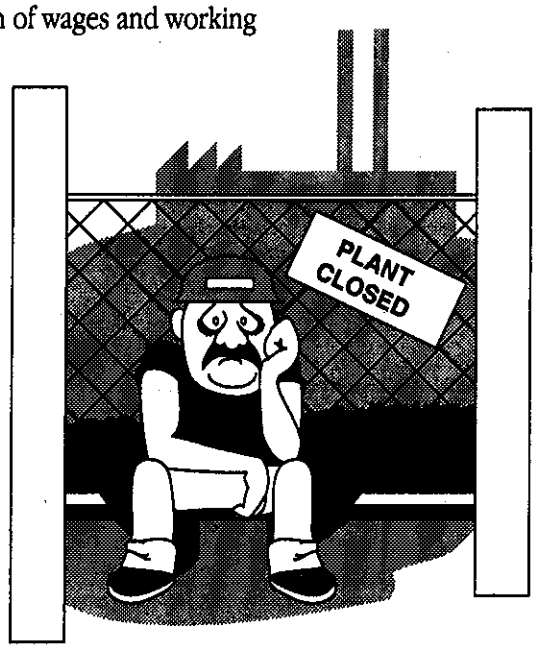
By Alvin Finkel

When the Alberta government touts the *Alberta Advantage* to international investors, part of its pitch is the investor-friendly atmosphere in the labour relations area. Put quite simply, Alberta has the lowest rate of unionization in the country. In 1997, according to Statistics Canada, 31.1 per cent of Canadian workers were members of unions while a further 2.9 per cent of workers were also covered by union contracts. The latter group includes workers in unionized workplaces who refuse to join the union on religious grounds as well as middle managers who are excluded from union participation but have their wages determined in large part by the outcome of negotiations for the collective agreement. In Alberta, just 22.3 per cent of the workforce belonged to a union in 1997, with 25.8 per cent covered by union contracts. By contrast, 41.9 per cent of people employed in Quebec, 41.2 per cent in Newfoundland and 36.8 per cent in British Columbia were covered by collective agreements. For Saskatchwan the figure was 36.5 per cent and Manitoba 37.5 per cent, suggesting Alberta is an exception, even in the West.

Why, given the benefits of union membership, are Albertans so much less likely than their fellow Canadians to belong to unions? The Statistics Canada report, *A Statistical Portrait of the Trade Union Movement*, prepared by Ernest B. Akyeampong of the Labour and Household Surveys Analysis Division, cites several causes for differences in union density among provinces. Differences in industry mix, labour laws and traditions all account for variation from province to province. The report offers no elaboration, but an analysis of industry mix, labour laws and tradition does suggest that it is unsurprising that Alberta has so low a percentage of its workers covered by union contracts. In the first place, the energy industry, which plays a dominant role in the Alberta economy, is largely non-unionized. While refinery workers have traditionally been union members, the people who work in the headquarter offices of the oilpatch, oilfield workers and workers in industries supplying equipment and services to the oilpatch are generally without unions. Efforts to unionize oilfield workers date back to the Turner Valley period of the industry in the 1930s. They have always been unsuccessful because of a combination of the implacable resistance of the oil companies, the transience of the workforce and traditions of individualism in this economic sector. Government legislation, as noted below, has also had its impact in this sector as in all sectors of the Alberta economy. Union members in Alberta are concentrated in the public services and in a relatively small number of areas of the private sector: construction, railways, packinghouses, forestry, oil refineries and mines. Public and para-public workers have high rates of unionization across Canada and Alberta is no exception. There is however, a variation among provinces as to which groups of workers comprise the public sector.

Privatizations and contracting out have occurred in all provinces but nowhere outside Ontario on the scale that they have in Alberta. Privatization does not always lead to workers losing their trade union status. The privatized telephone industry; for example, remains highly unionized. By contrast, liquor store employees—public unionized workers in all other Canadian provinces—have been private-sector employees since the Alberta government closed the Alberta Liquor Control Board stores in 1993. None of the

3,000 employees of private liquor stores are unionized and both studies supportive of privatization of liquor control and studies opposed note the huge decline in income of liquor-sales workers as a result of privatization and the end of unionism. Workers in other privatized areas such as registry services, seniors lodges, adoption services and tourism have also tended to lose their union status and to experience a deterioration of wages and working conditions.



Workers wanting to unionize in Alberta have had to cope with anti-union legislation for half a century as well as an anti-union attitude on the part of the Alberta Labour Relations Board (ALRB) and the cabinet which appoints its members. In 1944, Prime Minister Mackenzie King took stock of rising support for the socialist Co-Operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) and tried to woo labour by guaranteeing unions the right to organize without employer interference and by compelling employers to bargain collectively with legal unions in their workplace. The wartime emergency temporarily gave the federal government the power to legislate in the area of trade union rights. When the war ended that power reverted to the provinces except for workers under federal jurisdiction. While many provinces passed legislation that enshrined to some degree the rights bestowed by Ottawa in 1944, Social Credit Alberta, along with Union Nationale Quebec chose to pass quite restrictive legislation. Much of Alberta's legislation from the Alberta Labour Act of 1948 to the present has focused on restricting union organization and the right to strike.

The result has been that workers are less likely to be approached by unions in the first place and less likely, if they do unionize, to be able to make use of their collective power. Rulings by the ALRB and its predecessor, the Board of Industrial Relations, have tended to support employers in cases where workers and unions have complained of interference with the right of free speech on the part of employees and the firing of workers involved in unionization efforts. The results are obvious in many sectors. Alberta's huge non-government service sector is almost a desert for union organizers. Whether it is the tourist trade in the Rocky Mountain resorts, the shops in the West Edmonton Mall and other mega-malls, hotels, restaurants, daycare centres or the big boxes along the major arteries—unionized workers are as scarce as hen's teeth.

The exception is the supermarkets which have long been organized. Service workers are not well organized in any province; for example, bank workers are without unions almost everywhere in Canada, but the negligible unionization of service workers in Alberta is the result of the particularly low profile of unions in the province and the limited protections available to workers who attempt to unionize. Even construction workers, a highly-unionized group throughout the country, have faced precarious times in their efforts to maintain union organizations in Alberta. In the early '80s, the Conservative provincial government passed legislation that allowed construction companies with union contracts to create spin-off companies—that is simply a new incorporation with a new name—to get around these contracts.

Continued on page 7—Unionization

Growth Summit Spurs Public Service Renewal

By Lori Nagy and Bill Rice

"Everyone in the Alberta government knows that their organization has changed in fundamental ways," says Alberta Public Service Commissioner Jim Dixon. "The challenge is to create a flexible human resource framework that enables employees to succeed in the new environment."

This sentiment was echoed at last September's Alberta Growth Summit. Led by former cabinet member Ken Rostad, (facilitator of the Government sector) delegates took a hard look at the 20,000-strong public service. The important issues facing Alberta's public service and ways to attract and retain top quality employees were two of the main topics discussed by Government Sector delegates at the Summit.

In preparation for the event, Rostad asked all government departments to submit ideas and insights on the public service. The key issues are well known within government. After a hiring freeze was implemented in 1991, few young people were hired in the '90s. As a result, the average age of Alberta public service employees has increased to 44.

In addition, over the next three to five years approximately one-third of the government's current senior and executive managers are expected to retire. As a result, leadership development is an emerging issue.

Public service compensation has also been an issue. Alberta government manager salaries were frozen in 1991 and reduced by five per cent in 1994. Union member salaries were also reduced by five per cent in 1994. (On February 5, 1998 a tentative agreement was reached with the Alberta Union of Provincial Employees. This three-year agreement proposes to return the five per cent rollback to government workers and give another 2.25 per cent increase in September, 1998.)

Finally, the Alberta public service has been completely restructured. It's 30 per cent smaller than it was in 1994. And with the introduction of three-year business plans, employees are asked to focus on and be accountable for results. Business practices such as identifying outcomes, preparing and implementing plans, improving customer satisfaction and measuring and reporting on performance have become an everyday part of the workplace. As the Auditor General noted in his 1996-97 annual report, "My staff continues to note that there are many skilled and dedicated people in the public service. However, we are seeing growing evidence that the Alberta Public Service is under stress."

The most common government-related submissions to the Summit fell within four categories:

- setting a vision and clarifying the role of government;
- providing flexibility (to attain goals);
- renewal of the public service; and
- respect for the public service.

The final Growth Summit report included a number of suggested solutions including the development of strategies to retain valued employees and implementing programs to transfer skills and knowledge from people who are ready to retire to those who are new to the public service. Recommendations also call for attracting young people and compensating people in ways that respect and reward

accomplishment. The new role of government and the new roles expected of the public service must also be defined.

The Premier also promised a response card to indicate the approach that government will take on issues raised in the final report.

Behind the scenes, deputy ministers and human resource directors have been working together over the past two years to create a human resource strategy to ensure a strong and talented organization. At a planning session in 1995, deputy ministers initiated human resource development strategy along with a vision for the Alberta public service.

Alberta Public Service Commissioner Jim Dixon notes that the human resource strategy is on-going. "Deputy ministers and human resource directors continue to identify emerging issues and the initiatives that will best deal with them."

The vision developed by deputy ministers and human resource directors is: "The Alberta public service is respected for its attitudes, knowledge and skills, its effective management of public policy and its dedication to achieving quality, affordable services for Albertans."

Cabinet endorsed the vision in March 1996 as part of an overall human resource development plan, which targets four key areas:

- alignment—to ensure the goals and behaviors of individual employees are aligned with department goals;
- commitment—to introduce processes that build employee commitment to government goals and values;
- competence—to ensure the organization has the knowledge, skills and abilities to accomplish current and future business plan goals;
- versatility—to introduce processes for rapidly adapting and transforming the organization to meet the changing needs.

The January 27, 1998 speech from the throne signaled that the government is firm in its commitment to strengthen the Alberta public service. It reads: "The government will continue to provide responsive and responsible programs, through a public service recognized as among the most focused, creative and productive in Canada. It will strive to retain, attract and develop the talented, skilled and versatile employees required to serve Albertans' needs into the next century."

Lori Nagy and Bill Rice are communications consultants.

Unionization—continued from page 5

A sector that had traditionally been highly unionized in Alberta suddenly became virtually union-free. As the construction sector has heated up in recent years, unionization has made a strong comeback in the construction trades. But its near disappearance during recessions illustrates the impact of legislation on the fate of unionism. Studies comparing the wages and working conditions of union and non-union workers have always demonstrated the value of unionism for workers. While many of the employees in Alberta who are without unions do just fine without them, this is a province with a large working poor element. A legislative policy that favoured union organization would allow many of the working poor and near-poor to improve their wages and their working conditions. It would give them the chance of feeling some degree of empowerment in their workplaces. But, under the current government, it will never happen. The *Alberta Advantage* refers to an advantage for investors but it is at the expense of working people in the province.

Alvin Finkel is professor of history at Athabasca University and author of several books, most recently "Our Lives: Canada After 1945" and (with Clement Leibovitz) "The Chamberlain-Hitler Collusion," both published by Lorimer.

Alberta Careers Beyond 2000
Based on material prepared by Roger J. Goodman
Advanced Education and Career Development Alberta, 1996

Whose Advantage Is It?

Review by Suzette C. Chan

The Alberta Department of Advanced Education and Career Development has developed an extensive collection of resources to guide Albertans seeking to enter the work force or change careers. Occupational profiles, outlooks and other aids can be accessed on line through the department's website (www.aecd.gov.ab.ca) or in the more conventional paper format from the Learning Resources Distributing Centre at 427-5775.

One of the latest publications is *Alberta Careers Beyond 2000* and the accompanying booklet, *Industry Sector Profiles*, designed to outline opportunities through to the year 2005. These booklets are summaries of research commissioned by the provincial department of Advanced Education and Career Development. The research was contracted to Roger J. Goodman of Kernow Enterprises.

In agreement with most conventional economic indicators, *Alberta Careers Beyond 2000* predicts a strong future for Alberta's economy:

> "Over the years, the Government of Alberta has developed a set of policies, which, in combination with the province's high quality of life, educated workforce and natural resources, it calls the Alberta Advantage. These policies include lower taxes and a free-enterprise philosophy that encourages individual and private-sector initiative, privatization and deregulation. The Alberta Advantage is considered to be attractive to investors and is expected to continue through the foreseeable future."

But upon closer inspection, the Alberta Advantage may not be as good for workers as it is for the economy. Three disturbing assumptions underlie the direction mapped out in the books.

Assumption #1: Job security is a luxury

The report states there will be job losses in the public sector due to downsizing and in the private sector due to consolidative strategies to compete in the global market. "Workers will be constantly challenged to manage their own careers and expand their skills as they move laterally through a leaner, flatter [i.e. less chance for promotion] organization."

This trend seems indisputable and unstoppable over the next 10 years. Recently announced mega-mergers in the Canadian banking and retail sectors and the international computer and pharmaceutical manufacturing sectors have put tens of thousands of jobs in danger of elimination. In the public realm, the province continues to propose legislation which erodes publicly funded services, such as the proposed bill enabling the College of Physicians and Surgeons and the Minister of Health to approve of private, for-profit medical services and businesses.

In other words, workers will be increasingly subjected to management fads as they sweep through larger and larger corporate entities (and smaller and smaller public agencies), with few alternatives in workplace structures. The terms "redeploying staff," "hiring contractors," "as needed," "less job security" and "fee for service" all add up to the reality that the Alberta Advantage is built not only on the "high quality of life, educated workforce and natural resources" the province boasts about, but also on the right of workers to steer their own futures in a stable work environment.

Assumption #2: The economy will cater to high income baby boomers

Alberta Careers Beyond 2000 contains an awful admission of the failings of a market economy that

divides rich and poor and which allows a certain segment of the population to dictate the direction of the economy at the expense of other groups:

> "Society is becoming increasingly income polarized. A group of workers are vastly underemployed, while another group of workers earn high levels of income. This latter group have the discretionary income to use a wide range of personal services to reduce household chores, to reduce shopping time, to reduce the time demands of children, to reduce time spent at meal preparation and reduce home maintenance chores."

Alberta Careers Beyond 2000 does not provide numbers on how large this affluent population is, but they will surely be overworked in order to maintain the incomes needed to drive the retail economy. What type of quality of life and what values are we asking this influential class to subscribe to? The report predicts a great need for psychological counseling services for Albertans across the board.

The report tries to put an upbeat "spin" on the reality that the rest of us graduated behind the eight-ball. I myself entered the workforce in 1984, when job freezes and rollbacks enacted at the onset of the recession in 1982 were still in effect. Members of my generation never had those good jobs to lose, and won't have them to look forward to.

"The large number of baby boomers and the downsizing of organizations have created employment pressures. This has resulted in fewer entry-level jobs for the baby bust generation. Consequently, this generation will be more entrepreneurial and self-reliant in terms of creating their own work."

The problem with this euphemistic statement is that entrepreneurism for the baby bust will be hampered by the increasing reluctance of banks to deal in small business loans, in young people's post-secondary debt obligations and in the lack of job experience and mentorship to provide them with the work skills to make a successful run at a business enterprise.

Assumption #3: Current "Alberta Advantage" policies will stand unaltered and unquestioned by Albertans

There is no room in these reports for democratic due process. The tone of both *Alberta Careers Beyond 2000* and *Industry Sector Profiles* is one of inevitability:

> "Even with a growing economy, Alberta may see even further reductions in this area as services now being performing by government departments are contracted out or privatized." (*Alberta Careers Beyond 2000*)

While these projections are based on past performance and current policy, they do not prepare the prospective job seeker for the possibility that career prospects can be radically changed at the stroke of a ministerial pen or through the democratic process.

For example, *Alberta Careers Beyond 2000* predicts above-average growth in careers as photographers and technical occupations in motion pictures, broadcasting and the performing arts, but the government's elimination of funding decimated the industry. Valued at $150 million in 1996, the industry is worth less than $50 million today.

However, after almost two years of campaigning by supporters of the Alberta motion picture industry, Science and Research Minister Lorne Taylor recently announced he is developing a bill to create a tax credit program to foster and attract film and television production in Alberta.

The predictions made in *Alberta Careers Beyond 2000* and *Industry Sector Profiles* are based on specific public and private sector policy choices, ones which value measurable economic performance over the well-being and democratic rights of Albertans. It's an economic vision which, like everything else in this market economy, the buyer should be wary of.

Suzette Chan is a freelance writer and the Administrative Assistant for the Edmonton Social Planning Council. In researching her career prospects, she found no references to the charitable and human services sector in "Alberta Careers Beyond 2000."

Collaboration Needed to Improve Youth Employment

By Paul Cabaj

Compared with the rest of Canada, young people in Alberta have a better chance of getting a job than their peers in other provinces. But even so, for young people aged 15 to 24, the unemployment rate is about twice the rate of older Albertans. The problem is most serious for those who have high school education or less.

Over the years, young people have had consistently higher unemployment rates than the general population. It is natural that youth require some time to gain skills and experience, usually in a variety of different jobs and experiences, before finding the right career fit. However, recent changes in the labour market have made finding this fit a longer, more difficult process. Some of these changes include the following:

- A large number of the new jobs created in recent years have been taken by adults returning to the work force. The recession in the 1980s and early '90s created a large pool of unemployed adults with previous work experience, giving them an advantage over youth for new jobs. This includes new jobs in the retail trades and customer service sectors typically occupied by young people.
- Once the possession of a post-secondary degree or diploma virtually guaranteed a long-term job. Now, with the increasing popularity of post-secondary learning, there is a large supply of graduates from which employers can choose. Many occupations which traditionally have been a common goal for early school leavers, now require at least grade 12.
- Unskilled young people are becoming increasingly marginalized in the labour market. Employers' expectations for high educational and training standards have meant that those youth who have no post-secondary learning, especially those who have not completed high school, are having growing difficulties finding meaningful employment. This trend promises to continue as the technical gap widens between those who are trained and those who are not.

Government responses to the issue of youth employment depend on the type of youth targeted. For youth who have not completed high school or who are at risk of dropping out, activities that encourage them to stay in school, or to return to school, will likely achieve the most long-term success. However, initiatives to address some barriers to learning and employment such as poverty, learning disabilities, violence in the home and drug abuse, require the involvement of parents, community groups and business, as well as government.

For young people who have completed high school, the risk of unemployment is considerably less, but still significant. The more successful initiatives with this group focus on the school-to-work transition and improvement of employability skills and include help with job search skills, employer-sponsored training and short-term, skills-focused training. Once people in this group have achieved their critical first job, they are likely to benefit greatly from skills development and training on the job, or they recognize the need to continue on with post-secondary learning.

Youth who have completed some form of post secondary training will have considerably better employment prospects. The range of skills that this group has learned through years of study can transfer to many occupations. The best

responses for this group focus on providing summer and part-time jobs related to their training, co-op work programs, internships, or mentorships—activities that allow them to apply their education to the work world.

In order for youth employment programs and services to achieve long-term success, there must be concerted involvement by business, employers and the community at large. A.L. Flood, Chair and CEO of the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, was involved in producing a national report on youth employment initiatives. The report, *Help Wanted: How Can the Private Sector Improve Employment Prospects for Young Canadians?*" stated: "Youth unemployment and underemployment have emerged as among the most important social and economic issues faced by Canadians in the final years of this century. They are questions that cannot be addressed by governments alone. Canadian corporations need to assess their record on these issues and to determine constructive directions in which they can move to ensure a productive place for today's youth and for the next generation."

Government responses to youth unemployment are only part of the solution. There is an obvious need for partnerships between community members, employers, businesses and governments to open the paths that will connect youth to the opportunities that the next century offers. In order to do just that, the Alberta Government has established Youth Connections, a pilot project in Edmonton and Calgary. The project focuses on helping young people at greatest risk of unemployment or underemployment: those who have not completed high school and those who may have a high school diploma but have not gone on to further learning. Youth Connections is based on partnerships, with each of the partners doing what they do best, in cooperation with each other:

- Private sector partners identify occupational demands and requirements and provide placement and training opportunities for youth.
- Educators provide learning opportunities in ways that respond to the learning needs of young people and address the business needs of the private sector.
- Government supports the delivery of career services to young people and acts as the catalyst/coordinator for partnership development.
- Individual young people are members of the partnership and are motivated and willing to take on new challenges in learning and work.

In Edmonton, Youth Connections is offered through the Youth Employment Services Centre. The Centre has a 10-year history of working with young people to improve their career prospects by providing career planning services, job search assistance and funding for school. As part of the Youth Connections project, we have begun working more closely with employers by arranging direct employment placement, work experience job shadow and mentoring opportunities. For more information on the range of programs and initiatives to assist youth with their employment needs, call the Youth Employment Services Centre at 415-4YOU (415-4968).

Paul Cabaj is the Youth Connections partnership coordinator at the Youth Employment Services Centre, in Edmonton. The Centre is part of Alberta Advanced Education and Career Development.

Ending Youth Unemployment

By Dougal MacDonald

There is a very high unemployment rate among Canadian youth, officially, about 16 to 17 per cent. Alberta youth unemployment is 12 to 13 per cent in a "booming" economy. In some regions and among certain groups, unemployment is much higher. Of course, to any young person who cannot find a job, the unemployment rate is 100 per cent.

The rate of youth unemployment is about twice as high as general unemployment. Youth unemployment has increased steadily for the past 35 years, as long as statistics have been kept.

Many working youth are under-employed in low-paid, casual, part-time, temporary and benefitless jobs, even in the higher-paid sectors. For example, in the pulp and paper industry, where wages are generally higher, those under 30 years of age made up 37 per cent of the workforce in 1976 but only 11 per cent in 1996. Often, young people hold multiple low-wage jobs. Employed youth are concerned about losing their jobs or having their hours cut.

What Do Young People Think About Unemployment?

Youth are extremely concerned about unemployment and underemployment. Many do not see how they can earn enough of a livelihood to raise a family. They see their future being destroyed.

Young people are angry. One example is a young Edmonton retail worker who works only 80 hours a month at $7.50/hour. This barely pays rent, utilities and food and she runs a bank overdraft to make ends meet. She cannot afford a vehicle. The young worker concludes:

> *"If I knew who was responsible for this I would grab them by the neck and shake them."*

Young people are frustrated. They want to solve the problem of youth unemployment, but they can see that governments have created no mechanisms whereby they can give their opinions on an ongoing basis and actually participate in making decisions that affect their lives.

Proposed Solutions

Government and business propose various "solutions" for unemployment, like "job creation" and better training/education; for example, training in computer technology. Youth know, however, that "job creation" programs only create a few low-paying jobs that disappear when government funding ends. Training and education are expensive and do not guarantee employment.

Still, announcements of new programs continue. In February 1997, the federal government announced its Canada Youth Employment Strategy. On May 21, 1997, seven corporate executives announced creation of the "Corporate Council on Youth in the Economy." At the 38th Annual Premiers' Conference in New Brunswick August 8 to 10, 1997, the 10 premiers agreed to launch a nation-wide plan within four months to fight youth unemployment.

The outpouring of programs raises important questions. First, if governments and corporations are so keen to solve youth unemployment why

has it increased steadily since 1963? Second, how can governments and corporations solve unemployment when both are cutting jobs, especially in the past 10 years? Third, how can solutions be expected from "leaders" like Prime Minister Chretien who recently stated that the Soviet Union collapsed because "everyone had a job!"?

What Causes Unemployment?

Under our economic system, unemployment has always existed. Why? First, any society must produce to exist because society also consumes. But in our society, enterprises are privately owned so when goods and services are sold, profits go to the owners. Most profits are reinvested by the owners to accumulate more profits.

Some profits are reinvested in buildings, machinery, and raw materials. The rest is used to pay workers. But the trend in our economic system is that more and more capital is going into buildings, machinery and materials and less and less is going into paying workers. One obvious example is the meat-packing industry.

The main reason is the technical-scientific revolution. For example, increased use of computers and digital technology has meant less and less labour is needed to produce the same amount of goods and services. Production levels in Canada now surpass 1989 levels, even though according to the Canadian Economic Observer (February, 1997), in 1991 alone 1.3 million workers were permanently laid off.

There is also increasing use of outsourcing, contract work, part-time work, overtime and more intense labour. These trends also contribute to less labourers in relation to what is produced.

The use of modern technology and increased exploitation of labour have led to the "jobless recovery." Old jobs have been eliminated but new ones have not been created as fast. In a nutshell, unemployment exists because, to survive, corporations must continually produce commodities (and sell them) with fewer and fewer workers.

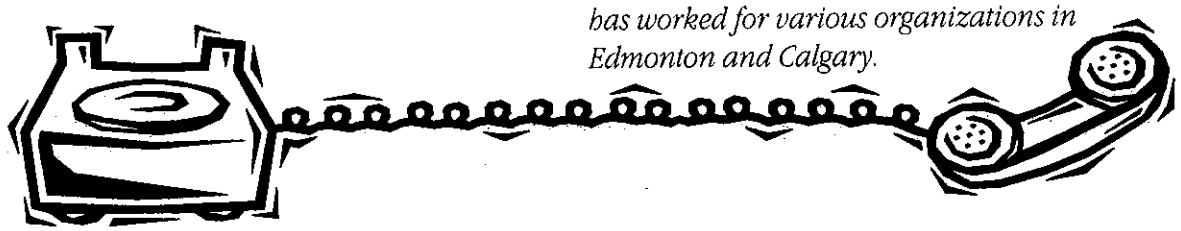
What Can Be Done?

The youth should take up the problem of youth unemployment themselves, discuss it seriously and begin to develop their own solutions. One proposal is to lobby for an immediate moratorium on debt payments and to invest more in social programs. The expansion of the public sector would increase employment. Another proposal is to establish that a livelihood is a basic human right.

Some suggest that if the root cause of youth unemployment lies in the economic system itself, what is required is for young people and everyone else to build a new society based on fulfilling the needs of all of its members. This would put an end to the current situation where profit is the sole aim of production and *employment* is completely incidental.

Such a society would provide for everyone and guarantee the livelihood of all citizens and residents. The economy would be planned with this objective in mind. In such a society there would be a bright future both for the youth and for the society itself.

Dougal MacDonald, a former professor of education, is an independent researcher who has worked for various organizations in Edmonton and Calgary.



Wage Gap Persists Between the Sexes

By Mimi Williams

"You've come a long way, baby!" The phrase easily conjures up the image of the popular '70s ad campaign: the tall, lanky model in designer clothes—cigarette in one hand and all of the opportunities of the world at her feet. But how far in these 20-odd years have working women come? Has the Alberta Advantage been an advantage to women in the paid workforce?

In the '70s, governments and employers appeared to support the concept of gender equality in the workplace. Canadian women demanded, and got, a Royal Commission on their status. Gains were made with benefits such as maternity leave, supports through public day care and initiatives such as pay and employment equity. As we entered the '90s, more women than ever before were participating in the paid workforce and the wage gap appeared to be slowly but surely narrowing.

Recent data, however, suggest a levelling off of the rate of increase in women's participation in the labour force. As well, the wage gap—the difference between what women and men earn—persists.

Statistics Canada's 1995 Survey of Consumer Finances indicates that working women, on average, earned $29,700 per year compared to $40,600 for their male counterparts. So, for every dollar a man earned, a woman could expect approximately 73 cents. This represents an increase of three cents over the 1991 figure of 70 cents. If this rate continues, women can expect to bridge the earning gap in the year 2027!

It has been suggested that even these modest *gains* may be less than they appear. Pat Armstrong, in *The Feminization of the Labour Force*, argues that the decline in the wage gap was not the result of women's incomes rising during the early part of the decade, but because so many men experienced a decline in wages.

Although wages have not kept step, the increase in the labour force participation rate of Canadian women this century has been dramatic. While less than 24 per cent of Canadian women worked outside of the home for pay at the end of the Industrial Revolution, by 1971 this number had nearly doubled to 40 per cent. In 1991, 60 per cent of Canadian women participated in the labour force. There are signals that these gains have stalled and women's workforce participation has levelled off.

Statistics Canada December 1997 data indicate that 64.2 per cent of Alberta women were labour force participants—one of the highest rates in the country. This figure, which remained constant throughout 1996, represents a 0.3 per cent decrease in women's labour force participation from 1995. Men's participation rate, on the other hand, has steadily climbed—from 78.5 per cent in December 1995 to 78.6 per cent in December 1996. As of December 1997, men's participation rate jumped to 81.5 per cent. You are, therefore, more likely to be benefiting economically from Alberta's boom if you are a male worker.

To view the substantial disparities in men's and women's situations, one must also look to earnings and income levels. The median income from all sources (including employment

earnings, pension benefits, unemployment insurance and welfare) for women in Alberta in 1995 was $14,600—the same as the national average. That figure for men, however, was $27,000—above the national average of $25,400.

As a single woman, you have a very good chance of living below Statistics Canada's Low-Income Cut-off (LICO)—40 per cent of unattached Canadian females lived below the poverty line in 1995 as compared to 32 per cent of men (*A Statistical Profile of Urban Poverty*, Canadian Council on Social Development, 1996). There are rising numbers of women living in absolute poverty (living at less than one-half of the LICO), particularly those heading lone-parent families. In 1996, Edmonton had the highest rate of absolute poverty among single parent families (as compared to major Canadian cities) with a rate of 24.8 per cent. In 1995, the rate was 17.1 per cent. This invariably hits women harder as 89 per cent of Edmonton single-parent families are led by women. Data have consistently shown that older, unattached women and women who are visible minorities, disabled or immigrant, run an even greater risk of living in poverty.

To put the Alberta Advantage in context for women, it is important to look at the types of jobs being *gained*. While we have been witnessing a boom in the construction industry and the oil patch, these jobs—along with government infrastructure programs—have gone almost exclusively to men. For women, there have been dramatic increases in precarious, non-standard work. This means more casual, temporary, part-time and contract jobs with no security no benefits and often no legislative protection.

It is these types of jobs which are growing for women in Alberta. The *advantage* for women means having to work more to get by, diverting already scarce time away from social and domestic responsibilities. An alarming number of women are juggling more than one job to make ends meet. A 1994 Statistics Canada report showed that the number of women holding multiple jobs grew 372 per cent over the previous 20 years; the number of men increased just 93 per cent.

In Alberta, since Ralph Klein came to power, the number of part-time jobs for women has increased while the number of full-time positions have decreased. The opposite holds true for men. When the government boasts of job creation, keep in mind that the single fastest growing component of the labour force in Alberta has been part-time work among women. Thirty-eight per cent of women work part-time not by choice but because there are no full-time jobs available to them.

There is no doubt that some women are doing very well in Ralph Klein's Alberta. But those who hold managerial and professional positions contrast sharply with the majority of women. The Alberta Advantage is increasing the polarization between good jobs and bad jobs. And it is women, who also perform most of the unpaid work in our society, who are filling the majority of the bad jobs.

Mimi Williams is a student of political science at the University of Alberta, a single parent of two children and a member of Edmonton Working Women—a non-profit organization committed to better wages and working conditions for women.

Systemic Racism:

A Study of Credential Devaluation of Foreign-Trained Indo-Canadian Professionals in Vancouver

By Dr. Gurcharn S. Basran and Dr. Li Zong

"Systemic racism" is a powerful form of discrimination which may be entrenched within the institutional framework of society and can be characterized as impersonal, unconscious, unintentional and covert. With systemic racism, it is not the intent which counts, but rather the consequence. Policies, rules, priorities and programs may not be inherently racist or discriminatory in intent. However, they may have a discriminatory effect in that they may exclude certain groups from access to equality. Immigrants with professional qualifications trained outside of Canada often encounter systemic racism in the Canadian labour force, manifested in institutions failing to recognize credentials of foreign-trained professionals and professional organizations acting as gate-keepers to make it difficult or to exclude immigrant professionals from practicing their professions in their adopted country.

Using the snow-ball sampling method, 201 foreign-trained Indo-Canadian professionals in Vancouver were selected in 1997. Professions included in our sample are doctors, engineers and school/university teachers. The term "foreign-trained Indo-Canadian professionals" in this study is defined as those who received professional training and completed their education from India or other countries and entered Canada between 1950 and 1997 and are now living and/or working in greater Vancouver. The data were obtained by self-administered questionnaires to see how racial exclusion results from devaluation of foreign credentials and to what extent systemic barriers actually affect the recognition of credentials of foreign-trained Indo-Canadian professional immigrants.

Findings demonstrate the difficulties faced by foreign-trained Indo-Canadian professionals in translating their foreign credentials and professional skills to entry into various occupations in Canada and thus there is a large pool of professional skill being wasted rather than utilized for serving Canadian society.

Table One shows that about 89 per cent of the 201 respondents sampled report that they worked in their home country as professionals (doctors, engineers, school/university teachers and other professionals) before they immigrated into Canada. However, only about 12 per cent of these respondents report that they work or worked as professionals in Canada after they immigrated. Although about 23 per cent of respondents have achieved relatively higher socioeconomic status in Canada by giving up their professions and becoming proprietors, managers, supervisor and administrators, about 60 per cent of foreign-trained Indo-Canadian professionals still remain in lower socioeconomic status in nonprofessional jobs such as clerical, sales, service, unskilled, farm, etc. In addition, another five per cent of respondents have never worked in Canada since they immigrated into the country. The survey also finds that about 89 per cent of respondents think that they are over-qualified for their present occupations.

Based on their experience and observation, over 54 per cent of respondents think that foreign education is not fairly recognized by provincial government agencies, professional organizations and educational institutions; only about three per cent think that foreign education is fairly evaluated where as about 36 to 43 per cent either did not answer the question or responded with "Don't Know." About 47 per cent of respondents do not believe that "the foreign education of foreign-trained professionals is compared to Canadian standards fairly," while

over 50 per cent either did not answer the question or responded with "Don't Know."

According to our survey data, a large number of Indo-Canadian professionals perceive discriminations from their experience. About 77 to 79 per cent of respondents believe that the statement "foreign work experience and qualifications overall are not fairly recognized by licensing bodies or regulatory agencies because of discrimination based on colour, national or ethnic origin, and speaking English as a second language" is true or partially true. Based on their own experience and observation, about 87 per cent of respondents reported that "the difficulty in having their foreign qualifications or credentials recognized" is a major factor that affects (78 per cent) or may affect (nine per cent) their chances to practice in the profession for which they are most qualified.

The study has demonstrated the importance of systemic barriers which contribute to occupational disadvantages for foreign-trained professional immigrants. It is evident that immigrants bring to the Canadian labour force significant resources of human capital. However, we need a better understanding of how these human resources are actually used after the immigrants' arrival in Canada. The discussion by policy makers of immigrant credentials cannot proceed without more detailed knowledge of the entry procedures and barriers that exist in the various professions. It is important for federal and provincial governments and professional organizations to understand how highly-educated, foreign-trained immigrant professionals establish themselves in the labour force and what systemic barriers they have encountered. The study suggests that in order for Canada to fully benefit from international human capital transfer, a policy is needed to ensure that the credentials of foreign-trained professional immigrants are evaluated fairly.

Dr. Gurcharn S. Basran is Professor of Sociology at the University of Saskatchewan. Dr. Li Zong is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of Saskatchewan. Their survey research on professional immigrants and evaluation of their credentials was conducted in the summer of 1997 in Vancouver. The research project is supported by the Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration, University of Alberta. The brief article is only based on a small portion of large data set. For more information you can fax your request to Dr. Basran @(306) 966-6950.

Table One: Occupational Attainment in India/Canada (N=201)

	In India		In Canada	
1. Professional	n	%	n	%
Doctor	11	5.5	1	0.5
Engineer	32	15.9	8	4.0
School/Univ. teacher	132	65.7	5	2.5
Other professionals	3	1.5	10	5.0
Subtotal	*178*	*88.6*	*24*	*12.0*
2. Nonprofessional				
Proprietary	0	0	22	10.9
Managerial	0	0	14	6.9
Administrative	0	0	11	5.5
Clerical	0	0	5	2.5
Sales	2	1.0	7	3.5
Operative	0	0	10	5.0
Service	0	0	6	3.0
Unskilled	2	1.0	19	9.4
Farm	3	1.5	37	18.4
Other	10	5.0	36	17.9
Subtotal	*17*	*8.5*	*167*	*83.0*
3. Never worked	6	2.9	10	5.0
TOTAL	201	100.0	201	100.0

Employment Program Offers Little Help

Theresa McBryan attended an employment initiatives course as part of her requirements for receiving welfare. After two and one-half months in the program, Theresa became ill and missed a couple of days. When she returned she brought notes from her doctor. The doctor's notes were disregarded by program workers and Theresa was thrown out of the program and cut off her welfare benefits. Theresa relates her experiences with the program in the following article.

By Theresa McBryan

My relationship with Goodwill Industries' Power of Work Program was initiated by the Alberta Department of Social Services in the beginning of December 1996.

Goodwill sells this program to the government as a service to help place individuals with multiple and severe job barriers in the workplace. Given Goodwill's status as a charitable organization with a history of working with mentally and physically challenged individuals, this service looks plausible enough. The very professional looking graphics on the office walls (and no doubt in the prospectus offered to government functionaries) further supports the idea that this is a program in which individuals will be aided to surmount their deficits and find a place in the economic life of the community.

I now know a lot about job barriers—I've had a crash course in how much the world changed while I was sequestered in the countryside raising my children. My education started in 1992 when, seeing the end of full-time parenting approach as my children entered high school, I entered school to develop some saleable skills. I took the graphic design and illustration course at Grant MacEwan Community College (GMCC), a very intense two-year course covering all aspects of the graphic design industry with a focus on illustrative techniques. I started looking for a job after graduation. I didn't have any luck finding a job or contract work so I took my design skills into our local pottery guild and designed a line of products which I could produce very economically and sell for a decent price. I had just begun to market this line, with some early success, when Social Services referred me to the Goodwill Program.

There my education took a quick lurch forward. On the surface the Goodwill program is very positive and pro-active. The outline of the program is plausible and the timeline generous.

Staff attitude was something else again. Quite early in the course the program developer said something to the effect that, "There is no point in being self-conscious about asking for a job. You are being exposed to a negative and contemptuous attitude just being on welfare anyway, what does it matter what a prospective employer thinks?" This was news to me.

While I had been busy raising my children out in the country all my energy had gone into the day to day struggle and working through some serious emotional issues emerging from past experiences. I had never noticed any "attitude" from the community. Since that period of my life I have been far too busy looking for a job—any job—or contract, or customer, to notice any "attitude" out there. The first time I encountered that kind of open contempt was from the staff at Goodwill's Power of Work Program.

Good visuals, a well articulated mission statement, plausible goals and a realistic timeline, helped sell this program as a way to get individuals off the system and into productive employment. However the success of the program depends upon facilitators and other staff actually making a difference in how participants understand concepts such as positive thinking. The minimally-trained and poorly-paid staff in this program are just not able to teach the ideas of positive thinking.

We were encouraged to access our interests and transferable skills when deciding on what career options we wish to pursue. Following the self-esteem introductory modules the emphasis abruptly shifted from finding a job you would enjoy doing, to "take anything you can get"—with heavy emphasis on the service sector such as waitress, retail, janitorial, service station, car wash, et al. After weeks of mixed messages about each participant's intrinsic value as a human being, none of us were very surprised by this turn of events.

Part of the problem lies in the individuals who enter the program. Since the government has been successful in cutting the welfare rolls by two-thirds, it follows the remaining one-third will be the walking wounded with the most severe psychic and physical injuries. They were given think-positive advice and self-esteem enhancing projects—all delivered with an attitude of self-righteous anger, resentment, contempt, loathing and frustration. The results were predictable.

Another part of the problem lies with Goodwill's conveyor-belt approach. Goodwill has entered into a contractual agreement with the government—they receive money up front for each participant but have to return an unspecified portion thereof if the participant does not find a job. They have a generous timeline in which to accomplish this and well-trained and motivated (i.e. paid) job placement counsellors that could build trust and inspire confidence in participants. But too many participants hanging around too long would overtax their physical resources very quickly—hence the conveyor belt approach.

My education into the ways of this new world at Goodwill has left a residue of cynicism. The Alberta government seems to be so enamoured by the corporate sector it would rather give Goodwill and other "poverty industries" social assistance funds directly instead of giving money to clients who would then buy goods and services which would eventually benefit the corporate sector.

Goodwill Industries' Power of Work program is a very graphic illustration of the old adage, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." I am sure those individuals who started the organization had good intentions. I'm sure the architects of its programming had good intentions. I'm even willing to accept that the governments incentive to aid people with the nuts and bolts problem of actually asking for employment was motivated by good intentions. What has emerged from all these good intentions is an institution where the most fragile and vulnerable members of our society are systematically psychologically manipulated, abused and forced out into work situations of a kind where they will be further exploited and abused. The sheer immorality of it all really bothers me personally. The sheer waste of funds should bother anyone who pays taxes.

For my own situation, I'm feeling pretty good these days. I'm selling my work, getting contracts, making money. It is sure a lot easier to have a genuinely positive attitude when there are real opportunities opening up.

Theresa McBryan is a local artist who won the right to a new appeal when she took the Department of Family and Social Services to court last August. She was again denied benefits after the new appeal.

A Reduced Workweek...
and Other Strategies for Coping

by Bruce O'Hara

Our worklife is full of stress. Paradoxically, it is as stressful for those who have work as it is for those who are not working. Those who have jobs are constantly running and working harder, putting in longer and longer hours and literally working themselves to death. This leads to dissonance between their working lives and their personal or family lives. As a result stress rises. The unemployed, on the other hand, are stressed by the effort of looking for work, the fight for basic survival and the cultural stigmatization of not working.

Unemployment figures are a fiction. The official unemployment figures do not take into account the underemployed, those who have given up looking for work and even many of our students who are parked in school because they cannot find work. It would seem to many people that there is not enough work to go around in this economy. But the unemployed are more than just a surplus resource. They are people like us who deserve the dignity of a job and the opportunity to survive in this economy. The paradox of the unemployment situation is that the employed are working longer hours while at the other end of the labour market many people are working less. There is a finite amount of work but it needs to be shared more equitably.

To solve this paradox, our society must take collective action. Only a legislated limit to overtime and a reduced workweek will effect change. But as individuals we need to prepare for the change.

Economist Frank Reid has examined numerous situations where work hours have been shortened. Reid found that if the reduction in work time was small, or affected only a few workers, little new hiring resulted. However, Reid found that shorter work times can be effective in creating new hiring if three conditions are present:

1. the reduction in work time is large, say a half day or a full day each week;
2. the reduction in hours affects many workers at once;
3. overtime use is restricted.

In the past, shorter work times have come not from the political or corporate elite, but from grassroots movements involving thousands of ordinary Canadians. Today the Shorter Work Time Network of Canada is working to create a similar coalition for change.

To be successful, the movement will need to involve a broad cross-section of Canadians: organized labour, women's groups, church groups, anti-poverty groups, political parties, pro-family groups, academics, environmentalists, health professionals, progressive businesses, public sector workers, students, unemployed people and the overworked.

The Network has organized chapters in nine Canadian cities, but much of the real growth in activity is in the form of informal linkages with individuals and organizations who share a similar vision of a society that works for everyone. When almost everyone is stressed out—either by unemployment or overwork—it's necessary to create a "psst, pass it on" movement where a great many people do a little part each.

Controls on overtime work have the potential to create somewhere between 150,000 and 250,000 new jobs in Canada. A hefty tax on all overtime would motivate employers to cover peak loads

with permanent relief staff, rather than overtime. Also helpful would be the conversion of all salaried positions to hourly wages. (Unpaid overtime is the biggest form of employee abuse in Canada today.)

Family-friendly schedules offer the possibility to create somewhere between 250,000 and 500,000 jobs, just by allowing the people who want to work less to do so. Employment standards legislation guaranteeing part-time workers the same hourly rates of pay, and the same job protection as full-time workers, plus a pro-rated share of benefits, will make it safer and more affordable to choose to work less. Canada should also look at what Frank Reid has dubbed Right to Not Work legislation, whereby no employee could be denied a request for reduced hours unless an independent review panel agreed that it was not feasible in that particular job.

Finally, making the move to a four-day standard workweek offers the opportunity to create more than one million new jobs across Canada. If done intelligently—and all at once—the shift to a four-day workweek could be done with only a five per cent loss in take-home pay rather than a 20 per cent loss for working four out of five days.

If statutory holidays are all placed on long weekends (i.e. they are unpaid) the actual reduction in work time will be 16 per cent rather than 20 per cent. Research evidence suggests that the productivity of workers on a 32-hour workweek will be about five per cent higher. A 32-hour workweek will so drain the unemployment rolls that the seven per cent of payroll that now goes into Employment Insurance could stay in workers' pockets.

When these savings are factored in, if employees take five per cent less pay for a four-day workweek, employers' total wage bills will rise by only five per cent. I would suggest that Canadian employers will be able to afford that added cost, doing business in the robust economy that will result when more than one million Canadians go back to work!

Here are a few other practical alternatives to the 40-hour week:

- Job sharing: two or more people share one full-time position with prorated salary and benefits.
- Permanent part-time: less than full time, but with seniority rights, promotion opportunities, prorated benefits and hourly rate of pay equal to full time.
- Leaves of absence: authorized periods of time away from work without loss of employment rights.
- V-Time: a voluntary time/income trade-off that allows employees to reduce work hours by five, 10, 20 or 50 per cent for a specified period of time.
- Banked overtime: programs whereby overtime pay may be converted to time off work.
- Phased retirement: employees approaching retirement qualify for a gradual reduced workweek without loss or reduction of pension benefits.
- Flextime: employees work a standard number of hours each week within flexible starting and quitting hours.
- Compressed workweek: employees work a standard number of hours in fewer days, i.e 40 hours a week in four, 10-hour days.
- Telecommuting: employees work at home part of the time, in some cases communicating with the office through a computer linked to a modem.

Bruce O'Hara is the author of two books about alternative work arrangements and a reduced work week. "Working Harder Isn't Working" is the latest title. He is the founder to a network of grassroots groups across Canada who are working towards a reduced work week and workplace options. Bruce is currently living in Australia.

Volunteerism...

Tracking the Trends

By Tracey Geyer

The last significant survey to determine the profile of the Canadian volunteer was the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy's *Canada Gives: Trends and Attitudes Towards Charitable Giving and Voluntarism*, 1988. The survey showed that women who traditionally worked in the home and volunteered during the day were no longer the "typical" volunteer. The volunteer of the '80s worked outside the home, was aged 35 to 50 and was just as likely male as female. A lack of current data has resulted in a new survey being conducted by Statistics Canada and the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy which will be released in 1998. The new survey will likely demonstrate that the voluntary sector has changed significantly since 1987. These surveys assist agencies and volunteer program managers in monitoring trends which potentially impact their programs. To successfully involve volunteers, agencies must consider the needs of the individual and adapt volunteer programs and positions accordingly. Volunteer programs that are able to respond and adapt to current trends related to the individual, family, schools, corporations and technology will maintain successful programs.

Individuals are more conscientious about making the commitment to volunteer.

Daily demands of family and work commitments are often priorities. When deciding to become more involved in the community, they are more selective about the choices they make regarding their volunteer contribution. Today's volunteer is more skilled and has greater expectations about the volunteer positions they will consider. Positions that are meaningful, challenging and offer the opportunity for skill development attract potential volunteers. Volunteers are very clear about their reasons and motivations for volunteering and are likely to attach specific goals to the donation of their leisure time. They are also more likely to make their needs and wants known. Some agencies have responded by providing more complex and demanding volunteer positions, such as crisis intervention, research and training. Others haven't adapted.

Volunteers required for daytime positions or positions that require a long-term commitment are becoming difficult to find. The pool of homemakers who used to be available during the day is rare. Volunteers are often interested in short-term or project based assignments with a defined end date. Programs that are flexible in accommodating changing schedules are more successful in retaining their volunteers.

Another recent trend is that of "family volunteering." A 1991 *Family Matters* survey found that families are most often motivated to volunteer by the desire to pass community service values down to their children *(Family Matters: The First Year; Points of Light Foundation* 1992). Volunteering as a family allows families to spend quality time together. The family is able to share a common bond and learn more about each other through their volunteer work. By being able to offer positions where two or more family members volunteer together, organizations will find they have more recruitment options.

Schools and educational institutions are mandating community service, or service learning, as part of the curriculum for their students. Institutions from junior high to post

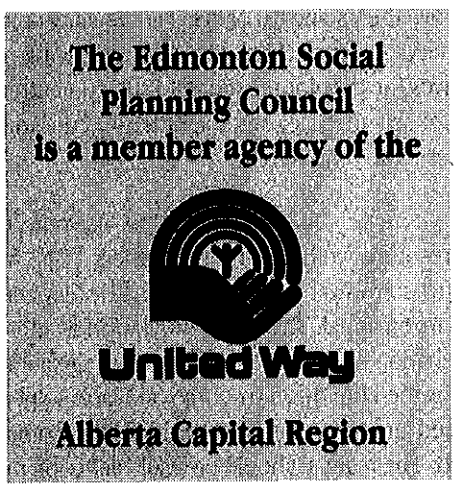
secondary levels include a volunteer component as part of course work. There is recognition by educators that there are increased learning opportunities and that studies become more relevant for students. This provides an opportunity to introduce and develop a life-long commitment to the voluntary sector. In a sector where there is limited involvement of males, there is increased exposure of boys and young men to alternative volunteer and future employment options. To ensure positive experiences to develop this commitment, agencies are challenged to find meaningful, relevant placements for these students during times when the students are available.

The emergence of corporate volunteer programs is another important trend in the sector. Business leaders believe that business should "give back to society" and that "social responsibility should be part of the corporate mission". In addition to the dollars donated to an agency, corporations are encouraging and recognizing the volunteer contributions of their employees. The corporation is seen as contributing to the community in which its employees live. Volunteers are able to contribute unique skills and expertise to agencies; they are also in a position to gain new skills that can be applied in their work setting. These programs vary in how they are administered. Employees may be given "paid" time off or be seconded to assist with projects or be formally recognized by the corporation for the volunteer work they choose to do on their own time.

Managers are beginning to realize the potential of the internet as a tool for running effective volunteer programs. Technology will allow for alternative ways of recruiting, training, supervising and communicating with volunteers. People who are interested in volunteer opportunities they can complete via home or work computers will be become "virtual volunteers." These are individuals who, because of time constraints, personal preference or a disability that prevents them from volunteering on-site, would otherwise be unavailable or unwilling to volunteer in a more traditional way. The virtual volunteer can provide technical assistance by conducting on-line research, designing publications, translating documents or maintaining a web-site. Other volunteer opportunities providing direct contact and support to clients can be considered. These include: electronic "visits" and providing on-line mentoring or instruction.

Tracking and monitoring trends are important to ensure agencies are current in their approach to the development and sustainability of their volunteer programs. Adapting volunteer positions and programming to fit the changing profiles of the individual volunteer, societal values and technology are an ongoing challenge. Organizations that are proactive and plan for these changes will flourish and continue to attract skilled, diverse and committed volunteers.

Tracey Geyer is the Volunteer Coordinator in the Community Health Promotion and Preventive Services section of Capital Health. She also acts as the Leadership Development Consultant at the St. Albert Community Information and Volunteer Centre.



From: **Edmonton Social Planning Council**
Suite 41, 9912-106 Street
Edmonton, AB
T5K 1C5
Phone: 403.423.2031
Fax: 403.425.6244

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Poverty in Action...Part of the Solution

By Midge Cuthill and Deana Shorten

In May 1997 an incredible event took place—the Western Canada Poor People's Conference. It was incredible because it went from a dream to reality in only six months. It was spearheaded by a small group of committed and hard-working individuals who were able to fundraise and solicit donations of goods and services to host 297 participants from B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

After the conference was over, the group Poverty in Action (PIA) was formed in Edmonton. It was felt by many Edmonton participants that the issues relating to poverty must be challenged from a grassroots level. PIA is guided by an advisory committee made up of people who are experiencing, or have recently experienced, poverty. The committee sets the direction of the group through monthly meetings.

PIA has recently received funding from Health Canada for a grassroots mentoring project. We've repeatedly heard how people would like to work to improve their standard of living and quality of life, but need guidance. The grassroots mentoring project involves the development of two sub-committees: one for self-advocacy and the other for educating ourselves and the public.

Self-Advocacy: PIA's mandate is to "use our skills and resources to help empower others." One way we plan to do this is by developing an advocacy and resource manual. This manual will include an explanation of current Social Services regulations as well as the Edmonton resources available to people in need and it will answer questions most commonly asked. The manual should be available to the public after March 30, 1998.

In April, PIA will begin a training program for those interested in learning advocacy skills. The program will allow people to advocate for themselves and others—to secure their rights in the Social Services system. We also plan to provide advocacy support to the public beginning in August.

Education: PIA's ultimate goal "to share, to empower, to educate" will be achieved through the *sharing* of experiences, *empowering* ourselves through self-advocacy and resource development and *educating* ourselves and the public.

PIA is developing a public-speaking course—to train members to speak at schools, universities, church groups, service clubs, etc. about the realities and daily struggles associated with poverty. We also offer bi-monthly workshops on such topics as: media relations, welfare policies and procedures, the appeal process, etc. The workshops make participants aware of their rights and give tips on how to exercise rights.

PIA can have a positive impact on others by making them aware of our fight to maintain dignity in the face of sometimes overwhelming odds—by coming together we can learn from each other.

Many talented volunteers from the community have shared their skills and expertise with us and they deserve recogniton for the guidance and support they have provided to us thus far.

If you would like more information or you would like to make a donation, please contact Midge or Deana at 423-2031.

Midge Cuthill is the Project Coordinator and Deana Shorten is the Project Assistant of Poverty In Action.