

increase. The underlying demographic transition resulting from the aging of the baby boom generation will, overall, cause the proportion of the labour force over age 45 to begin to increase, despite projected levels of withdrawal from the labour force by older men. Officials from Employment and Immigration Canada anticipate that the proportion of older workers in the labour force will grow from just under 25% today to 30% by 1995. It should be noted, as well, that rates of early departure from the labour force by older men, especially those in the age 55 and over category where departures have traditionally been concentrated, have shown recent signs of moderating. If recent increases in rates of early retirement prove to be a reflection of cyclical labour market conditions, rather than a long-term trend, then the greying of the labour force will occur more rapidly than current projections may indicate. But even if its precise timing and extent remain uncertain, there can be no uncertainty about the aging of the labour force itself. The older worker is destined to become, in both numerical and proportional terms, a progressively more important part of the Canadian workforce.

These demographic and labour force trends make it critically important that Canada succeed in achieving the productive involvement of older Canadians in the workforce. Failure to do so, first of all, threatens the right to an opportunity to work, and where discrimination on the basis of age is involved represents an additional departure from the human rights standards to which Canada is committed. It must be recognized that in what the philosopher Hannah Arendt has described as the "society of jobholders", where the identity of individuals as well their connections to the community hinge centrally on occupational status and income, employment has become, as never before, a human rights issue.

A failure fully to accommodate the older worker could also have serious implications for Canada's future economic health, as the supply of workers in other categories shrinks and national productivity becomes directly dependant on our productive use of older workers.

If today's policies exacerbate future labour shortages they may also create conditions which will lead to new human rights problems. The option of retiring while still capable of productive work, for example, could become subject to serious pressure under conditions where a shrinking labour force must support increasing numbers of the dependent elderly.