

Comment

Comment is an opinion column open to members of the university community who wish to present an informed opinion on a topic of their selection.

Job Corp A Delusion

by Cheryl Downton

Last spring, as is usual every year, the employment situation looked pretty grim for the summer months. As usual, the students and young people seemed to be the ones who would be hardest hit. Things looked worse than in previous years, as some of the short term summer grant monies (OFY) had been cut off and the unemployment picture in general continued to deteriorate.

Gerald Regan and his Nova Scotia Liberals, not to be outdone by their federal counterparts and their Young Canada Works programme, initiated a job creation package of their own: Job Corps, the programme which would make jobs for 1000 Nova Scotians during the summer hiatus. The news was splashed in the printed media by means of full page ads (including a not so recent picture of Gerald Regan perhaps so we would remember just who was doing us the big favour). Other media were also inundated with announcements of the upcoming programme. What could have been an admittedly small success, turned into a political farce.

The proclamation of 1000 available jobs caused much muttering among the masses. 1000 jobs when upwards of 50,000 are unemployed? From the very beginning the programme was handled badly, only serving to reinforce beliefs that this was just another political tool created solely to serve the purpose of government. Why fill out a Job Corps application and hire staff to process them, when any one of several manpower centres have lists of people already registered for work. It would have been a relatively simple procedure to acquire the rolls of the unemployed persons in each and any community, and use these to find people for jobs and vice versa. Yet the government chose to launch its own advertising campaign which itself cost taxpayers thousands of dollars.

At the completion of the programme, Job Corps chose to keep a lower profile, but public statements were made, the majority erroneous. Bob Geraghty, an administration 'official' for Job Corps, was quoted as saying the programme was certainly a success and there was a good possibility that there would be future programmes of a similar nature. In a radio news interview, Geraghty stated that 500 people left the programme before its completion. The reasons he cited included the statement that these people left for other jobs (true in most cases) and that the reason they were able to find other jobs was largely aided by the work experience gained through Job Corps placements. It has been suggested that this was not necessarily the case. Job Corps workers took other jobs, where available, because Job Corps 'opportunities' were of such poor quality, both financially and organizationally, that anything else looked good. Prospective employers could not, and indeed did not, put much store in experience gained through a few weeks of employment with this programme.

The very nature of Job Corps — to provide Nova Scotians between the ages of sixteen and sixty-five 1000 placements for the summer months (or part of) — necessitated

that government departments come up with make work projects. This had to be done in a comparatively short time, and even into July it was not certain which programmes or thoughts and ideas would be utilized in some departments. This, in turn, meant that people were left hanging and that some projects were late starting and could supply only a few weeks of work.

When programmes were finally formulated, they were, in most instances, lacking organization, and could not realistically expect to

get needed work done. This is not to say nothing was accomplished: 1200 people were employed; it is the nature of this employment that is questionable.

Another sticky point is the financial rewards available. \$2.75 per hour for a forty hour week can not be expected to sufficiently support a family, and this combined with the menial and uninteresting work, added to people's discontent.

A glaring example is the project of the Job Corps which was funneled through the Nova Scotia

Housing Commission. Persons throughout Nova Scotia were hired to conduct a four page survey, door to door on housing conditions. Survey questions were for the most part inconsequential i.e. 'how many bathrooms on the premises?' and 'what is your annual income?' The employees participating in this survey work were also expected to code and summarize weekly information obtained. Not a task requiring much initiative and giving little job satisfaction.

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