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**U.N. study says today's youth not prepared for workforce**

**Youth unsure about future**

by Rick Warren and Elisabeth Eid

Bleak employment prospects and high youth unemployment into the 1990s were the conclusions reached by a recently completed workshop.

The youth workshop, entitled "Young Canadians look at future prospects for work," was part of the three day Conference on Human Work, which brought more than 200 representatives of the public and private sectors, the churches, organized labor and youth from across the country to examine and propose solutions to on-going problems in the Canadian labour relations scene.

The youth session was chaired by Senator Jacques Hebert, founder of the Katimavak youth program, and chairman of the newly established Senate Committee.

Senator Hebert documented the sad case of youth employment with statistics supplied by Goldfarb consultants — the pollsters of the Liberal Party. One of the interesting facts provided by the Goldfarb people is that students are ambitious people — the majority want to be successful and make their mark in the world.

Yet the main concern of young adults has shifted from upward mobility in the corporate world to finding a job — any job. This, of course, has been prompted by the dismal state of the Canadian economy.

The unemployment rate of young people 15-24 is about 21 per cent — 10 per cent higher than the national unemployment rate. Fifty per cent of young adults 20-24 years old, are working only part-time because they cannot find full-time employment.

The Canadian economic picture is a far cry from the early 1950s: when 93 per cent of the workforce was comprised of fulltime permanent workers. Thirty years later, in 1983, only 73 per cent of workforce worked full time.

An estimated 359,000 jobs were lost to youth during the recessions of the last decade, and government officials are predicting youth unemployment will remain high into the 1990's. Youth, women and older workers remain the most vulnerable to cutbacks during recession

and technological change.

The high-tech world is providing some new employment opportunities and the new emphasis is on continuing education to "retool" people for the changing technology. However, Catholic Bishop Remi Deroo quite vividly emphasized the challenge for new technology is for it to serve humans ... not to render humans obsolete or to make humans slaves to technology. In his 1981 encyclical "On Human Work", Pope John Paul II says that Man is to be treated as a human subject and not as a mere object in the work force.

Technology also tends to have "... a dislocating effect and the nature of work is redefined," said Senator Hebert. This is what is usually called unemployment in the "un-bureaucratized" of the general population.

Social program cutbacks and the threat of technological change is causing severe social problems, said Canadian Labor Congress spokesperson Katherine McGuire. She says any changes must be phased in with consultation and input from workers along with programs created for job retraining.

The majority of the country's youth continue to have faith in the education system. The Goldfarb poll shows two-thirds of young people 15 to 24 consider education helpful and will eventually help them obtain a job.

Young students raise questions about the wise career choices in today's diverse and constantly changing society. One Edmonton teacher suggested that an informative job information program be established to help prepare students to make career choices. Yet, some school boards are laying off guidance counsellors during these tough economic times, according to one high school counsellor.

United Nations studies reveal that for the first time ever today's youth is less prepared for the work force than the preceding generations. The world of "Future Shock," as author Alvin Toffler calls it, is upon us, and young people find it increasingly difficult to prepare for a world which is changing so quickly.

And high profile educators at a conference at the University of Alberta last spring, including Uni-

versity of Calgary president Norman Wagner, were advocating the benefits of a liberal arts education to prepare students for life.

Students continue to feel they have no voice in the decision-making process. The lack of an effective organization to exert student pressure in the political process appears to be the major problem. The seeming futility of organizing such an effective student lobbying group seems to be the largest stumbling block.

Senator Hebert sympathized with the problem, but could not offer any solutions within the power of his Senate Committee on Youth.

However, the future of the Senate committee is still unknown. The Senator says he hopes the committee will continue under the new Progressive Conservative government and hold meetings across the country to hear the problems of youth.

So far, the committee's major accomplishment following its formation earlier this year, has been to invite written submissions to consider, examine, and make recommendations on the problems facing Canadian youth.

Senator Hebert deferred questions regarding additional funds for education stating the matter is a provincial issue.

Senator Hebert appeared as the major spokesman of the youth panel and two youth representatives did little but give affirmation to the Senator.

We expected a workshop entitled "Young Canadians look at future prospects of Work" would include a panel of young adults to discuss some positive possibilities for the future with government, business and organized labor.

The International Youth Year, through the Secretary of State department, contributed \$7,000 for youth involvement at the Conference on Human Work.

Students must demonstrate some responsibility by forming an effective lobbying group and working together with government, the private sector, the churches, organized labor and academia to combat the crisis of today's youth.

Perhaps for the first time, youth are uncertain about their role in tomorrow's world.



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