

Job absenteeism

Canada is losing about \$21 million a day as thousands of workers do not show up for their jobs, according to a study on absenteeism.

The study, conducted by George Sanderson at the recently-disbanded Centre for the Study of Inflation and Productivity, is one of several documents being examined by Labour Department officials preparing a policy discussion paper for Labour Minister Lincoln Alexander.

The Minister is to decide, after he gets the policy paper, whether Cabinet should tackle the problem of absenteeism immediately.

The first step would be to commission labour and management representatives to conduct a study on absenteeism and how to reduce it.

The Sanderson study, based on Statistics Canada figures and research by private industry and provincial governments, says about 83 million days of work were lost to the economy through absenteeism last year. That's more than ten times the 7.3 million days lost through strikes, lockouts and similar symptoms of labour-management disputes.

Mr. Sanderson found that rates of absenteeism vary in different regions, companies, occupations and industries although there is no conclusive evidence of national patterns.

Some figures showed that unscheduled absence is highest in the winter because the weather is bad. But some companies say it is worse in the summer when workers take extra time for hunting, fishing and other leisure activities.

The farther a worker lives from the plant or office, the likelier he will be absent, said Mr. Sanderson. And while younger workers are likely to have the highest frequency of absence, older workers are absent for longer periods at a time.

Some industries said absenteeism drops as the unemployment rate rises, but others said absenteeism rises "because workers hold onto jobs they would normally quit, but compensate for this by taking time off work".

News briefs

The first oil discovery in Ontario in seven years was made recently by a Calgary company. Bluewater Oil and Gas Limited said the discovery well in Plymouth Township, about 40 kilometres east of Sarnia, Ontario, had an initial flow of more than 1,200 barrels a day. Herbert Pietsch, company vice-president for production, described the well as "pretty big, even by western standards".

The Federal Government and the government of Nova Scotia will co-operate to help young people in that province find employment. The two governments recently signed Canada's first federal-provincial agreement in the area of youth employment. The agreement commits the provincial and the Federal Government to an exchange of employment-related information and to consult prior to the implementation of new youth employment programs and services or related policies.

A Buddhist college was opened in September at Brock University in St. Catharines, the first college of its kind in Canada, university officials say. The Karma

Buddhist College, which will be associated with Brock but not affiliated, will be a teaching centre and the North American home for the Karma Kargyu Society, a Buddhist group. The college will provide instruction for a residential community of about 30 students and to some non-resident students. All members of the Buddhist college will be fully registered Brock students who will combine regular academic studies with Buddhist teachings and meditation.

A \$46.8-million Arctic vessel and marine research institute, to be built in St. John's, moves Newfoundland a big step closer to becoming a world leader in cold ocean science, says provincial Premier Brian Peckford, who has announced federal approval of the institute, scheduled for completion in 1983.

Hearing aids are now available free of charge to handicapped Quebecers 35 years-old-and-under, the provincial government has announced. Social Affairs Minister Denis Lazure says 6,000 persons are expected to benefit from the program, expected to cost \$1 million in its first year.

Quebec's first centre for evaluating cars damaged in accidents was opened in Quebec City recently. Operated by the Association of Automobile Insurers, it will provide a rapid estimate of car damages after an accident for insurance purposes. Sixteen similar centres are scheduled to open in five other cities by next spring.

Anyone charged under the Criminal Code will have the right in Ontario to a trial by judge or jury speaking in French or English beginning December 31. This

extension of French-language court services in Ontario follows changes to the Criminal Code passed last year in Ottawa, which gave each province the option of permitting the accused person the right to be heard by a bilingual judge, and bilingual jurors in jury trials. Ontario will join New Brunswick as the only other province where the amendments have been proclaimed. In Quebec, English-speaking residents have had trials in English since Confederation, but that province has not yet enshrined the Criminal Code amendments.

The Whitefish gas field in the Arctic Islands, already considered as perhaps the biggest in Canada, is probably bigger than was originally thought, said John Buckley, chairman of Southern Petroleum Ltd. He said seismic data indicated the Whitefish structure extends well into an area in which his company has a 30 per cent interest, and total reserves may be as high as five trillion cubic feet. Outside of Whitefish, gas reserves in the Arctic Islands are estimated by Panarctic consultants at 12.7 trillion cubic feet.

Dan Swasfield of Calgary is establishing a firm called Sober Friend Home Escort Service. "Basically, we're offering a drive-home service to people who've had a few too many," Mr. Swasfield said. "It's like an auto club. Customers pay a \$2 fee, register their insurance with us, and for \$15 a trip we'll drive them home when they have a glow on." The company will serve only the "cheerfully inebriated". Obnoxious drunks and unconscious ones will have to fend for themselves.

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