

Survival in the 80's

'Labor Report' recommends changes

In recent months Ottawa has produced two Task Force Reports that point to greater federal involvement in post-secondary education.

The Breaux Task Force on Established Programs Financing has received most of the publicity, but it was preceded in July by the release of the Labour Market Development in the 80's Report prepared for federal minister of Employment and Immigration Lloyd Axworthy.

The 'Labor Report' questions how prepared Canada is to provide much needed highly trained labor for the 1980's. In its chapter on post-secondary training, the report, which does not necessarily reflect official or unofficial government policy, suggests sweeping changes in university priorities and curricula.

Since it addresses only the labor market, the report gives little credence to the general

social and cultural goals' of university education beyond recognition that some base support should be given those faculties not now producing highly-valued graduates (e.g. Arts, Education) to "maintain the academic base."

Beyond such minimums, "governments should ensure that training dollars are invested wisely so that society receives the highest possible return on its massive investment in people," the report says.

Using its narrow self-imposed cost-benefit analysis of university offerings, the Labor Report not surprisingly finds the highest returns among business, engineering, economics, and health disciplines, and lowest among the arts, education, and social work.

(Critics of the report say a more realistic 'human' analysis of university offerings would find just the opposite results).

The cost-benefit results, says the Labor Report, also show the "overall size of the post-secondary sector is too large and has concluded that it could be contracted somewhat, with resources modestly reallocated from education, general arts, and sciences, and social work to engineering, business, economics, and

technology."

Such reallocation would help reverse a situation where now some 67 percent of post-secondary students graduate from arts, science, and education, with only 10 percent in engineering, 69 percent in health and medicine fields, 10 percent in business, and 3 percent

in law. The report predicts Canada's changing labor landscape requires far more of the latter graduates.

To effect such a result, the Labor Report suggests "reducing the total commitment of resources to post-secondary training to free

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Criticisms deleted from 'Report'

The chairperson of the Task Force Report on Labor Developments in the '80's says "we've gone a bit off base on our direction for post-secondary education."

"We've got ourselves locked into a post-secondary educational structure that makes it difficult to adjust to changing demands in the labor market," says Dave Dodge.

Dodge admitted, however, that in spite of the perceived misdirection, some criticisms

were withheld from the final Task Force Report when it was released last July.

A draft of the report leaked to NDP MP David Orklow in May, was extremely critical of the provincial governments' handling of post-secondary education.

It said, "action on the part of the federal government would not be necessary ... were it not for the fact that the provinces generally seem to have accorded a high

priority to distributional and equity objectives."

It added that "to the extent that provinces give higher priority to ... making post-secondary education accessible to as many as possible they are likely to exacerbate manpower objectives."

Both criticisms were deleted from the final report because, "we wanted to be careful that we didn't come out slamming someone else too hard," said Dodge.

Progressive employment practices suggested

A federal Task Force report that recommends massive changes in post-secondary education predicts equally massive changes in the Canadian "labor landscape" in the '80's.

The Task Force Report on Labor Market Development in the '80's says growth in the labor force will slow significantly in this decade.

By 1990 only 2.6 million people will be added to the workforce, those in the 18-24 age

group actually declining by 100,000. Two thirds of the total increase will be adult women, and the Native working age population will grow almost four times as fast as that for Canada as a whole, the report says.

To cope with these numbers, the report predicts 2.8 million jobs will have to be created in the 1980's. Most will be in highly-skilled blue collar or high technology fields, including communications and computer

technology.

As well, the greatest area of growth in demand for new labor will be in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta, and Saskatchewan, with very low growth predicted by non-metropolitan areas in Eastern Canada.

"Canada is already facing a crisis over skilled workers," says minister of Employment and Immigration Lloyd Axworthy.

"It will be largely among the

ranks of women workers that we will find new recruits," Axworthy says.

To accommodate women, as well as greater numbers of Native and disabled workers, the Task Force suggests progressive employment practices, wage subsidies, training or re-training, and better pre-job counselling.

It also recommends the government create an Opportunity Development Corporation to help identify and develop local

and community employment opportunities, and that the government stop supporting declining industries through tariffs, quotas, tax incentives and loan guarantees.

An integral part of the Task Force's re-employment strategy is a massive restructuring of post-secondary institutions away from general arts, education, and social work programs toward engineering, business, and high technology fields.

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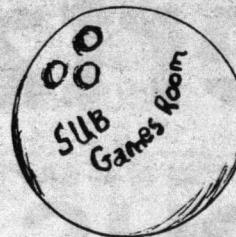
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