



Edmonton Archbishop Joseph MacNeil.

Inflation vs unemployment

by Margaret Baer

The Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops' New Year's statement entitled "Ethical Reflections on the Economic Crisis" was the topic of debate at the U of A last Wednesday evening at St. Stephen's College.

Edmonton Archbishop Joseph MacNeil, Father Russell Pendergast of the U of A's Department of Economics, and Richard Cappon of an international accounting firm, all spoke and answered questions about the much-publicized bishops' statement.

"Ethical Reflections" identifies unemployment, rather than inflation, as the number one economic problem. It further states: "The fact that some 1.5 million people are jobless, constitutes a serious moral, as well as economic crisis" in Canada.

The statement focuses on two principles central to recent Catholic social teaching: (1) a preferential option for the poor, the afflicted, and the oppressed—the victims of the recession; and (2) the 'priority of labour' principle, which says that human labour must take precedence over capital and technology in the development of an economy based on justice.

The bishops raise some fundamental social and ethical issues pertaining to present economic realities, which, according to the Catholic leaders, reveal a "deepening moral disorder." "Ethical Reflections" criticizes the current policies and strategies for economic recovery espoused by governments and corporations, questioning the values and priorities implicit in such programs.

Archbishop MacNeil outlined the basic economic principle that "human resources are the fundamental cause of production; everything is based on the quality and quantity of human resources." Now, with technology displacing human labour, MacNeil asked, "Where are these people going? This is why the creation of unemployment to fight inflation is so immoral."

Father Pendergast also emphasized the uniqueness of human labour amongst the other factors of production—resources, capital and enterprise. "Human beings are not just another 'factor of production'. We can't just trade off inflation and unemployment and assume that by leaving it (the economy) alone, it'll all work out by itself," said Father Pendergast.

Richard Cappon, the accountant from Coopers Lybrand, also spoke of the dignity of human work and the current transition to a high-tech, capital-intensive industrial base. He said the business community has been forced into "writing a new book" dealing with the new issues and problems resulting from the technological revolution.

Cappon said most people in the business community do not understand the bishops' statement, especially in Alberta, where "we've never really known what it

is to be unemployed." He continued, "The business community is sensitive to the problem and it doesn't know how to handle it. This caused businessmen to give a knee-jerk reaction against the bishops' statement, but once the dust settles, I think they'll see there's a lot there."

While speaking about the dignity of work, Cappon asked, "What about the dignity in leisure? What is fundamentally wrong with not working?" He objected to the bishops' emphasis on the special value of work in developing one's self-worth, saying instead that it comes down to the dignity of a person, not just his/her job. He stressed a more wholistic view of life.

Cappon called for an "Ethical Reflections on Leisure", stating, "we've all got to begin to understand we're going to be unemployed for most of our lives." He said we should become more "proactive" rather than "reactive", meaning we should become more self-sufficient and less dependent on employers. Cappon did not, however, explain how an unemployed person can provide for himself in a highly interdependent world such as ours. As one woman in the audience asked, "Leisure time is fine, but what about food, shelter...?"

Father Pendergast said most Canadians are "very unaware of the structure of their economy. Canada is not independent nor self-sufficient, so we don't have a lot of options."

However, one of the first lessons an aspiring economist learns is: "Don't tear down the house - examine the structure of it", said the Economics professor. He applied this to Canada, stating, "Prudent action might produce a more integrated economy" in which the country would not be dependent on selling raw materials where we have no control over their uses.

Father Pendergast echoed "Ethical Reflections" which criticized the current Canadian economic model of development as being "primarily capital-intensive, energy-intensive (non-renewable resources), foreign-controlled, and export-oriented."

Archbishop MacNeil said the eight bishops of the CCCB's Social Affairs Commission who drafted "Ethical Reflections" never considered it to be a major document. He noted that a statement called "Unemployment - the Human Cost", which was released by the bishops in 1980, was a much more radical document. Though the attention of the media has been unexpected, it has been most welcome, said Archbishop MacNeil.

Amidst all of the publicity there is, of course, much criticism of the statement. To charges of Marxism, or at least Leftist tendencies in the bishops' proposals, Archbishop MacNeil countered with, "In creating high unemployment, there is no better, dearer breeding ground for Marxism."

The most common criticism has been that because the bishops

are not economists (in fact, some of them are), they are not qualified to preach about the sacred realm of economics. The fact that economists the world over cannot agree on solutions to the problems of contemporary capitalism points to the lack of scientific exactness in economics and the need for alternatives.

"Ethical Reflections" does not propose a new economic theory; it does not pretend to have all of the answers. It does, however, challenge Canadians to "envision and develop alternatives to the dominant economic model that governs our society....As Christians, we are called to become involved in struggles for economic justice and participate in the building up of a new society based on Gospel principles."

Archbishop MacNeil sees "Ethical Reflections" as a "positive, challenging document" that will prod consciences and stimulate create debate and, hopefully, solutions.

Anti-Zionist exec

OTTAWA (CUP)—The entire executive of the University of Ottawa students' federation has been impeached after attempting to deny a Jewish student club access to university facilities.

The Jewish Students' Union (JSU) circulated a petition in September calling for the executive's impeachment after it was denied the use of tables and meeting space in the university centre. The executive had passed a motion in July prohibiting pro-Zionist groups from using university space in the wake of Israel's invasion of Lebanon.

The JSU struck back, with support from the local media and the university administration. Ottawa's daily newspaper denounced the executive's actions as an infringement on freedom of speech.

The administration stepped in to grant the JSU club status. The executive claimed it had no plans to deny the club status.

The JSU gathered more than 1,000 signatures on a petition, forcing the students' federation to call together a body that has not met in living memory; the student court.

The court convened Feb. 2, less than two months before the end of the executive's term of

office. The executive admitted to spending thousands of dollars for two of Ottawa's most high-priced lawyers.

The JSU charged the executive with blocking freedom of political expression, holding secret meetings to prevent press scrutiny, and abuse of power.

The impeachment trial, believed to be the first in Canadian student history, ran for weeks, attracting overflow crowds. The 1983-84 election campaign had meanwhile begun—and two of the candidates, Antoinette Layoun and Francine Morel, both were facing impeachment.

The student court announced March 8 its 4 to 3 vote to impeach president Chantal Payant and social activities commissioner James Bardach, who publicly dissociated themselves from the executive's actions during the controversy. The vote to impeach Suzanne Boxxe, academic affairs commissioner, finance commissioner Layoun and representation commissioner Morel was unanimous.

Only Bardach has said for sure he will not appeal the decision. Neither Layoun nor Morel plans to withdraw from the federation elections.

U eyes peeping prof

VICTORIA (CUP)—Public pressure has finally forced the University of Victoria administration to investigate the actions of an economics professor accused of sexual harassment by women students.

Economics chair Gerry Walter says the senior administration's investigation into Ezra Mishan is now underway. The announcement came once week after the student newspaper, the *Martlet*, ran its fourth story on Mishan's conduct.

The economics prof has been the centre of controversy since

complaints surfaced last fall that he used his office to interview women students for nude modelling at his home.

Several students who were interviewed by Mishan say the professor insisted on handling them while they modelled and verbally abused them during their interview.

Last fall the administration instructed Mishan not to use his university office for such interviews, but complaints kept resurfacing.