

How much did you make last summer?

By JOHN STAPLETON

To those of you who made \$1.75 per hour or more at a summer job and found that the conditions you worked under were tolerable, this article is certainly not about you. It should, however, be of interest to many students. Many of us, perhaps because of the surplus of university students looking for work, had to take jobs which would strain the dignity of anyone that thought that his services were of any value at all.

There is, however, a general ignorance surrounding just what constitutes an intolerable job at an unthinkable wage. This ignorance is recognized by Michael Harrington in *The Other America* and John Porter in *The Vertical Mosaic*.

They refer to the forgotten 40 to 50 million Americans and 4 to 5 million Canadians who are members of the itinerant labour forces or who are out of work altogether. When I speak of students in this light, I am speaking about those who, out of desperation, joined Canada's itinerant and seasonal work forces. They joined a world where the Employment Standards Act is the Bible of the employer, a world where, because of this act, a seasonal worker has no real protection from whatever working conditions or pay rate his employer may impose upon him.

The ignorance of employment standards and the inability or choice of our society not to recognize people who must live with these standards is something I will prove to many readers of this article.

First of all, is there a minimum wage and what is it if there is one? Is there any guarantee that a student will be able to make enough to remain in that capacity?

The question concerning a minimum wage is a complex one. The Employment Standards Act does in fact stipulate a \$1.30 minimum per hour for all workers over 18. However, there is an interesting clause which says that if an employer and an employee enter into a contract and if time and a half is paid for overtime, then that contract is legal providing the director approves.

There is, therefore, no true minimum wage in writing. For students, this situation does not apply. A student must be paid at least \$1 per hour but he may be paid 90¢ per hour for the first month of his employment. These provisions for students are only valid between May 15 & Sept. 15; outside of this time, he has no real protection except at the discretion of the director.

If a student were to work 48 hours per week; i.e. 8 hours per day, 6 days per week, every week from the beginning of May through to Sept. 15, he would receive al-



most exactly \$900. For a 40 hour week (which is more traditional) he would receive about \$800.

Now, from this, he must pay about 40¢ per week in Unemployment Insurance Fees. This is irretrievable since a student can't work six months out of a year; this is the minimum period required for eligibility. For compensation over the 19 week work period, this entails some \$7.60.

Now, we must consider the minimum amount of money needed in the summer. Travelling expenses kept at 50¢ per day is sometimes impossible in the city and only a possibility there if one uses public transit. This conservative estimate, then, entails the expenditure of \$39. The most money possible to net if the laws are implemented by the employer is then about \$855.

Now, we will consider the ridiculous idea that this student (remembering that he has worked 8 hours a day, 6 days a week from the day he finished school right up till within 2 days of his first class in mid-September) will spend no money at all during the summer. He will go nowhere, buy nothing — just live at home and work.

At most Ontario universities, the \$855 would be eaten up immediately by tuition, books and minimum transportation costs to and from the university. He, of course, could live only at home. The idea of living anywhere else would be economically preposterous.

Of course, as ironic as it may seem, the student in this position is lucky; he has a job and has no room and board costs. The student who works in a lodge might well experience the condition of minimum wages and maximum board.

Tacked on to this, there may possibly be very irregular hours and embarrassing curfews. Maximum room and board in Ontario is \$17 per week. Over a period of 19 weeks, this would come to \$323, bringing a student's earnings down to \$532, not enough for tuition here at York.

Student loans, the supposed cure-all to this situation do not necessarily save things. One may find that his parents will just not give him the money for his education, having already destroyed his chances for a loan.

The fact that there are so many applications makes it necessary to deal with most students entirely through the mail. Too many people have really needed money and they were denied it. Too many others have bought cars with the money they supposedly needed for their education.

However, the indignity suffered when you discover that the Ontario Government legally demonstrates that a university student is not worth the money it takes for college, is the worst aspect of a rotten situation.

poem

by delores broten

*I was there with Wolf-mother
sending death to husbands in the park
with lurking trees like trembling in the loin
— a mystic in the cold way
the dark way
the hollow way
to walk on shells*

*the devilled men have cried "Madonna!"
their faces hanging in my hair
heads against my breast
to blood my calm
my gentle calm
my empty calm*

*I have eaten of the slaughter-house
the suicide, the genocide of all of you
and been betrayed
for giving birth to children in the park*

