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THE WORLD OF WORK

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The opinions expressed in this paper are not necessarily those of the Canadian Labour Congress nor of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada.

INTRODUCTION

Introducing the topic of the changing labour market environment, like introducing any change, brings about controversy. We would particularly address the oft mentioned criticism against the labour movement being against change in the workplace.

CLC President Bob White said it best when he responded to the German finance minister at recent meetings of G-8 countries about his criticism of workers resisting change —

“Let me put this to you: if change for a worker means they’re losing their job, that the next job is half pay, that their kid who’s coming out of university can’t get a job, that all of a sudden their partner’s got to go to work to supply the income, then they’re feeling very insecure — I don’t know about you, I couldn’t handle that change and I don’t think you could.”

“Now if change means the worker’s getting retrained, being paid to get retrained, technology they’re going to get to learn about, that if they are going to be laid off, there’s a good social safety net as they go through this and they’re not worried about what their kids are going to do, as long as they get a good education, you won’t find many workers will fight that change.”

The World of Work

When dealing with the Changing Labour Market Environment and the “world of work” it is necessary to look back and review the events that brought about the present conditions.

Up until the 1980s, Canada’s federal governments promoted attempts to achieve a full employment policy. Since the advent of the Free Trade Agreement (F.T.A.) and its expansion into the North American Free Trade Agreement, governments have been caught up in the transnational corporate goals of globalization, competitiveness and a race to the bottom in leveling the playing field of social programs, health and education programs, unemployment benefits, equity programs and assistance to those of most need within our society. Following the lead of corporate downsizing to become more efficient and under the guise of deficit reduction, we have seen governments at every level reduce programs and services across the board to the point where there are serious problems in the delivery of most services that we had, not so long ago, taken for granted.

Which leads to the changes we are seeing today and which will be addressed in this paper: levels of unemployment have risen dramatically — to the point of full employment being a distant dream of the past; real wages have been falling at the same time; jobs have shifted from high paid manufacturing to low paid service sector jobs; skill requirements have proven unpredictable; educational levels have been steadily rising; the labour market discriminates against women, minorities, youth and seniors; the labour market is local (or regional), not national.

◆ **Labour market trends and human resource practices**

Leaving the thorny issue of what counts as skills until elsewhere in this document, there is a picture emerging about changing job skills levels. There are many claims about work becoming more skilled, and some are. There is also a large proportion of jobs which are being deskilled. There is a lot of evidence of this. Here are four examples:

At a recent seminar in Ottawa as part of a Humanities and Social Sciences Federation of Canada series, Professor Harvey Krahn of the University of Alberta shared the results of a study that compared reading and writing levels required on workers’ jobs with those same workers’ levels of literacy. He found that about 75% of workers had jobs that matched their literacy skills.

Of the rest, he reported that four times as many had a literacy surplus as a literacy deficit. Four times as many had literacy skills exceeding job requirements as had a skills shortage.

In another study, Statistics Canada’s 1994 national *General Social Survey* revealed that 22% of employed Canadians with post-secondary credentials reported themselves as “over-qualified” for their current job.

In January, 1998, an article in the *Canadian Economic Observer* looked at some evidence of under-employment in Canada.

We know that one sign of underemployment is that many people start their own businesses when they cannot find other jobs. And we have certainly seen a lot of that across Canada in recent years.

A second sign is high levels of unemployment. We are so used to historically high unemployment that the government can get away with claiming victory when the levels fall below 9%.

A third sign of underemployment is the number of people who want full-time work but can only find part-time — what economists call “involuntary” part-timers. Right now almost a third of part-time workers are in that category.

A fourth sign is the willingness to accept “non-permanent” jobs — temporary, casual and seasonal jobs — that offer no security whatever. The *Canadian Economic Observer* article points out that 12% of all paid workers are now in the “non-permanent” job category. Unlike in the past, very few of these are “seasonal”. Half are holding “temporary” jobs and another third are “casual” employees.

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Government workers have not been immune to changes in the labour market as indicated by the following synopsis by the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC):

- *flexible workforce in the federal public service*

A recent article in the HR Reporter, a trade journal for human resource personnel, reported on a series of interviews with senior HR representatives from leading Canadian companies. In response to questions around the primary needs of their organization, the unanimous requirement was identified to be a flexible workforce. Flexibility as defined by the HR community would suggest a workforce prepared to compliantly accept variable wages, working conditions, work schedules, benefits, and employment.

This increasing private-sector emphasis on flexibility has not gone unnoticed in the federal public service. The Liberal government has initiated, through legislation and policy, a comprehensive program aimed at injecting “flexibility” in the delivery of federal programs and services as well as in the management of its workforce. Two areas in which the government’s emulation has been most apparent are the fields of staffing and work re-organization.

- *staffing*

The “shamrock” model of organizational design that gained currency during the 1980s, marked a significant departure from the traditional employee-company contract. Gone were fanciful notions of lifetime employment with one firm. Instead employers approached workforce restructuring with an emphasis towards the retention of a small

core component of full-time workers supplemented by a much larger, “non-standard” workforce engaged on a temporary or contractual basis.

This duality is increasingly coming to characterize the federal government workforce. Over the past ten years there has been a significant decline in the proportion of indeterminate (regular, full-time) employees and a corresponding rise in contingent workforce: term, casual, and contract employees. *In the fiscal year 1996-1997, term and casual appointments represented 96.9% of all appointments to the federal public service.* The Public Service Commission, the federal body responsible for the regulation of staffing activity, interprets this trend to reflect “the greater need for temporary resources during a period of transition and restructuring” — flexibility!

Further evidence of the contingent workforce becoming a stable feature of government is found in data from the PSC 1996-97 annual report that shows that 31% of term employees had been reappointed three-or-more times in succession. To facilitate the ongoing exploitation of contingent workers and avoid being saddled with a permanent obligation, the federal government, in 1995, introduced changes to public service staffing legislation that eliminated the practice of automatically “rolling over” term employees into indeterminate status after five years of continuous service.

The erosion of the merit principle, once the proud cornerstone of public service staffing, also continued unabated. Only 37% of all appointments to or within the public service were submitted to a competitive process in the 1996-97 fiscal year.

- *work re-organization*

In addition to staffing, the federal government is also pursuing flexibility through changes in the organization of work. As part of its program review initiatives, most federal departments have undertaken efforts to redesign work processes, eliminate “unnecessary” work and intensify that which remains. The government’s Alternative Service Delivery (ASD) program directs managers to relinquish all but the very core services of government to the private sector. Among those activities deemed appropriate for privatization through ASD are food inspection, air navigation, and the operation of military bases.

One example of work re-organization in the federal sector that uses technology to create an alternative work arrangement is telework. Telework or telecommuting allows employees to work from their home for all or part of the week, connecting to their office through computers and modems. Teleworkers interviewed for a PSAC study conducted between 1991-95, spoke about the advantages of avoiding the time, traffic, and expenses associated with commuting in major urban centers. They also, however, mentioned the difficulties of juggling work and family responsibilities when working from home, the longer hours, and employer expectation of higher productivity. Union activists recognized

the challenges posed by a dispersed workforce in terms of organizing, representing, and involving members in union activities.

In summary, the Public Service Alliance of Canada believes it is important to acknowledge the federal government's stature as a significant employer and direct proper attention to the activities occurring within federal organizations. Thousands of Canadians working for the federal government are being subjected to variations of many of the regressive human resource practices emerging in the private sector. As well, public service unions face additional challenges in responding effectively to these changes due to the ability of their employers to introduce or amend legislation at their convenience.

A concerted effort to undermine worker rights has been launched based on the pronounced requirement of Canadian companies and governments to achieve enhanced levels of flexibility in order for them to become competitive in today's global marketplace. The "world of work" for government employees has meant increased use of contingent workers, privatization, downsizing, wage controls and the acceleration/intensification of work.

The PSAC also believes there are alternatives available, opportunities for employers and unions to develop safe, high quality workplaces while protecting and improving wages and working conditions. Our own involvement in a joint adjustment program has demonstrated that even the impacts of major transitions can be mitigated if the commitment and effort is forthcoming.

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All of this indicates a labour market that is unable to support and fully satisfy the existing labour supply.

In response, people claiming a growing skill requirement for jobs will point to the fact that more educated workers have much lower levels of unemployment.

But that begs the question. Is the lower level of unemployment among the more highly educated a sign of a growing demand for skills? Or is it a sign that more educated workers are bumping less educated workers out of lower skilled jobs?

We believe the latter is precisely what is happening. What we are seeing is a high stakes game of musical chairs. Education is proving an advantage because there are too many people chasing too few jobs. Employers can demand more credentials even though those credentials are not necessary to do the work.

One final piece of evidence is the behaviour of governments and employers — the very people most aggressively pitching the line of a future with highly skilled jobs.

Once we get past their rhetoric about training and skills being the key to our future, we find a federal government that has shifted policy from labour force development to labour market deregulation.

- a government that is cutting billions from its support for training;
- a government that is busily creating conditions for “competitiveness”, for downgrading wages and working conditions, by negotiating trade deals that pit us against workers in third world economies — workers earning deplorably low wages and having few rights or protections;
- a government deliberately creating desperation for any job under any conditions because of its cuts to social programs, social assistance, workers’ compensation, protective labour laws and Employment Insurance. In 1989, 83% of unemployed workers qualified for Unemployment Insurance. Because of changes, largely brought in by the Chrétien government, only 43% of unemployed Canadians qualified for Employment Insurance last year. And their benefits are reduced as well.

Employers are behaving no better. They are focused not so much on training but on work reorganization and the use of new technology to replace skilled workers — to diminish the need for skill. That is why they can push “multiskilling” — a term that may sound nice but reflects the fact that employers have stripped skills from individual jobs and have been able to repackage what remains as if it were more.

The only good news is that their plans are not working as well as they had hoped. They have not been able to build the skills into the technology and get rid of skilled workers quite as quickly and easily as they had planned.

The main point is that, from labour’s perspective, *the problem is not too few skilled workers but too few good jobs*. And there is every sign that this is going to get worse in future.

The problem is deeply rooted and is caused by foreign ownership, misguided government economic development strategy, decimation of the public sector, and employers’ design and use of new technology.

Since the problem is an inadequate demand for skills, not too limited a supply, it cannot be solved by training.

What is happening here?

Mainly, there is the desperate state of the economy. It is an employers’ market. Whether the job is deskilled or not, the employer can demand qualifications that have little or no correspondence to the requirements of the job. Education, for employers, is a useful means to sort people at a

time when there are far more workers than jobs. Any worker who objects to the demand for more and more credentials on the grounds that she can do the work is cast aside in favour of five who comply with the employers' demands. Furthermore, workers faced with high unemployment, high job insecurity and a skyrocketing number of jobs with a contingent attachment to the labour market (part-time, sessional, seasonal, contract) view education as a potential competitive advantage for themselves. Education has reverted to one of its traditional functions in our society — as a way of sorting people. Whether or not more education is necessary for people to do their jobs is a moot point. Education is being forced on workers because it is one of the key bases by which employers decide who gets the opportunity to work.

◆ **Skills Mismatches and Transitions** (This section is based on Turk 1993.)

Are jobs getting more skilled? Here the evidence is as good as any job forecasting can be, and the answer is “no”. The distribution of jobs is becoming more pear-shaped. The great bulk of middle level, middle skill jobs are being replaced. A minority of them are being upskilled, and the majority are being deskilled. The most sophisticated job forecasting is done biennially by the United States Bureau of Labour Statistics. Their surveys show a consistent pattern: the bulk of new jobs are at the low skill end of the spectrum. In their most recent projections (Silvestri & Lukasiewicz, 1991), they list the ten occupations that are going to account for the greatest number of new jobs between 1990 and 2005. Only two of them qualify as highly skilled. They project that the largest category of new jobs will be retail salespersons. Second will be registered nurses — one of the two highly skilled jobs. Third will be cashiers. Fourth will be general office clerks. Fifth will be truck drivers. Sixth (and the other high skilled job) will be general managers and top executives. Seventh will be janitors and cleaners, including maids and household cleaners. Eighth will be nursing aides, orderlies and attendants. Ninth will be food counter, fountain and related workers. Tenth will be waiters and waitresses. These are the ten jobs that will represent the largest numerical growth — hardly a picture of a high tech, high skill future.

Canadian data shows a similar pattern. Even within jobs, new technologies are being used to deskill work. More and more of the “skill” is being built into the technology — so that less skilled workers can use the more skilled technologies. Ironically, the sophistication of the technologies one uses at work is being used as evidence that the work demands more skills.

This was brought home to me when I ran into an old friend who is a skilled machinist. I had not seen Matthew for several years. I asked how things were at work. His reply was “great”. He told me that he had a new job at his old plant. “What are you doing now?”, I asked. “Oh, I sit in an air-conditioned control booth and oversee the operation of a whole bunch of computer-controlled machines.” “That’s great, but what do you do?”, I persisted. “Well, I sit in this wonderful control booth and make sure everything is operating correctly.” “Yes, but what do you do?”, I asked again.

After several more attempts, Matthew described what he “did” — which was to wait for a red light indicating trouble and to phone the appropriate person whenever it went on. While he now sits in air conditioned splendour (for the computer’s benefit, not his) and works with very

expensive technology, his job is largely deskilled. His biggest challenge is dealing with the boredom. Matthew's experience is not atypical in the wonderful world of new, computer-based technologies.

The result is a deskilling of work even when the working conditions improve (air conditioning for the computers) and the responsibilities increase (Matthew's inattention could cause enormous damage). Despite this — apparently undaunted by the reality of what is happening in workplaces — we are increasingly confronted with rhetoric about the growing skill of work and the need for reform of education to meet the needs for a more highly skilled workforce of the future.

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The assertion of rising educational needs in the workforce stems from two claims. The first is that the educational requirements of existing occupations are being rapidly upgraded because of the application of microprocessors and computers to these jobs. The second is that there is a rapid shift in occupations from ones requiring little education to technical and professional jobs that require considerable education.

Upgrading of Existing Occupations. (This section is based on Levin 1993.) It is commonly observed that the rising use of computers and other new technologies in many occupations must be raising the skill requirements of those occupations (Botkin *et al.* 1984: 80).

But, more persons who use computers in their jobs require no special computer skills. For example, warehouse clerks and supermarket checkout staff typically use a computer read-out device to read bar-codes on products as they are purchased, sold, shipped and received. The use of this device requires no knowledge of computers. Nor do bank tellers, word-processing operators, airlines reservation agents, and many other occupational groups who use computers need special computer skills. At most a person in these occupations has had to acquire knowledge of new procedures and equipment, often with the equipment reducing the skill requirements of the job with its rapid information retrieval and computational power. Goldstein and Fraser (1985) found that most workers who use computers in their jobs utilize standard software packages that require little previous education or training.

Reviews of studies on the impact of technologies on skill requirements reach the conclusion that past technologies have tended to raise skill requirements of some jobs and lower those of others with an overall effect of little or no change in the aggregate (Spenner 1985, 1986; Rumberger 1981, 1987; Flynn 1988). Capelli (1993) found some evidence of a rise in the skill requirements of production jobs between 1978 and 1986, but these affect a declining share of the workforce. Although manufacturing jobs accounted for 27% of all non-agricultural jobs in 1970, they had declined to only 17% of such jobs by 1990. Of the clerical jobs that Capelli examined, half experienced upgrading and half experienced downgrading. After reviewing the evidence on the impact of technology on skill requirements, the National Research Council concluded:

the empirical evidence of technology's effects on skills is too fragmentary and mixed to support confident predications of aggregate skill impacts. Despite this uncertainty, however, the evidence suggests that the skill requirements for entry into future jobs will not be radically upgraded from those of current Jobs (Cyert & Mowery 1987: 103).

That is, there is little evidence of dramatic shifts in the skill requirements (and presumably educational requirements) of jobs as a result of changes in technology.

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In fact the evidence is that new technology leads to deskilling and impacts those at the low end worse.

There is no better and more available example of the new workplace than the local McDonalds or Burger King. Both are excellent examples of most employers' dreams. The restaurant used to be a prime example of a labour-intensive, low-tech business. Most costs were wage costs and there were a range of skills from the highly skilled chef to the unskilled dishwasher. McDonalds and Burger King fundamentally changed the business. With the development and introduction of new technologies and the concomitant introduction of a new organization of work, they transformed the restaurant into a high-tech workplace largely devoid of skills. The most highly skilled worker is probably the cashier who does not even need to know the cost of any product. He simply pushes the appropriate button on the register and the machine enters the cost, totals the bill and advises the cashier on the amount of change to give. McDonald's and Burger King's work organization and use of technologies allows them to use the most readily available workforce — be it teenagers or senior citizens; have them ready to work with virtually no training; assign them to three hour shifts; replace them if they do not smile right; and yet be able to turn out a remarkably consistent product that meets management's design specifications, whether the operation is in Toronto or Tuscalosa, Alabama or Tokyo.

In different businesses in a variety of industries, this goal of consistent, high quality production that allows use of a cheap, available workforce and dispenses with reliance on skilled workers has proved elusive. But new technologies are making it possible, as in the case of McDonalds and Burger King. In these "new" workplaces, several workforce characteristics are evident. These are the characteristics of the future — characteristics that employers are trying to build into the educational system today to prepare tomorrow's workers for the employers' mold.

One characteristic is multi-tasking. This is not to be confused with multi-skilling, which implies that a worker has learned a number of skills. While employers often refer to multi-tasking as multitasking, it is a serious misnomer because the work, as in McDonalds and Burger King, is being emptied of skill. (It still may be demanding and stressful, but it requires little learning time.) Basically the pattern emerging is one of fewer people being assigned to do more and more deskilled tasks.

A second characteristic of the new workplace is teamwork. While teamwork has a nice ring to it, we must be clear about what it really means. Workers are increasingly made to be more reliant on each other and to take on supervisory responsibilities as a team. In some cases, teams have the authority to hire and fire “team” members. This new “freedom” is largely made possible by new technologies that make assembly-line production outmoded and by technologies that allow careful electronic monitoring of worker performance by management. As an added benefit to management, teamwork often allows a significant reduction in the number of supervisors — thereby cutting costs significantly. The only question that remains is whose team are workers actually on.

A third characteristic of the new workplace is loyalty and individual responsibility. Since the new workplace involves workers using expensive technology and a more integrated work process, substantial damage can be caused by inattention, by sloppiness or by wilful disregard.

It is not surprising that much of the current training of the non-managerial workforce is “cultural” — training not focused on skills but on indoctrinating the employees about the importance of competitiveness, loyalty, and company policy. Multi-tasking, teamwork and loyalty are the focii for workers in the management-designed workplace of the future.

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◆ **The stress of involuntary change due to downsizing**

Stress, whether inside or outside the workplace, is difficult to separate from the previous discussions as well as the last point on the acceleration of the pace of work and the intermingling of these points around stress will be obvious.

In today’s economy the buoyant optimism of the 1950s and 1960s is missing. The result is a sense of insecurity that is especially harsh in the modern workplace — whether it is experienced in the corporate boardroom, in the managerial office, or on the plant floor. For it is in the context of work that some of the most complex, most subtle transformations to modern society are taking place.

The nature of work, the hours, the place, the responsibilities, the people, the future — the likelihood of employment itself — have changed and will continue to do so. Not only has work changed, the way work is done has altered significantly. Computers are faster than typewriters, modems and faxes swifter than even the most efficient mail service. Today’s technology has two dominant characteristics: it is getting cheaper and it is changing rapidly.

The real costs of technological change are imposed most painfully on those who cannot adapt, such as older workers or businesses that cannot keep up with or acquire the new technologies. Moreover, while technology creates some jobs, it displaces others. Employers must find skilled workers. Employees must learn new skills, which may quickly be overtaken by the next round of new technology.

The pressures of ever-increasing competition and changes in the organization of work have intruded into even the most sheltered sectors of the economy. They ultimately reflect demands by customers for longer business hours, higher quality products, and better and friendlier service. The broader public sector is also under pressure to maintain and improve services, while responding to fiscal restraint.

Families of today face three major, and often competing, pressures: the need to care for children, especially pre-schoolers; the need to care for aging parents; and the need to maintain family incomes, which now often require that two people have paid work.

In one of every three dual-earner families, the wife's earnings account for more than 40 percent of the family's total income. Clearly, few people have jobs that, by themselves, enable their families to live according to a standard they deem to be comfortable. For the past 20 years, with stagnant real wages, that standard has been maintained because people are working longer hours and because more women have entered the workforce. Consequently, there has been an unbroken rise in the labour force participation of married women. The number of families headed by single parents is also on the rise. These trends have created a difficult situation for those, especially women, who combine work with household responsibilities. The statistics confirm that women's work on the job and at home has increased in the new environment.

A generation ago the "typical" Canadian family had a male breadwinner with a female homemaker running the household. Almost three-quarters (70 percent) of families were configured in this way in 1961. By 1991, less than one in five households looked like this. Even among families with children under age six, less than a third fit this stereotypical image. Indeed, by 1991 the stereotype had flipped on its head: over 60 percent of "nuclear" families in Canada (two parents and children) were dual-earner families. More than 55 percent of lone parents were also working by 1991.

Canadians working outside the home for pay, especially women, still have important and time-consuming family responsibilities. For example, while the full impact of a greying population is still more than two decades away, 51 percent of employees currently provide some care to an elderly person.

The real social revolution of this generation has to do with increasing female labour force participation rates, particularly among those who are raising young children. In 1981, 48 percent of women with young children were in the labour market. By 1993, the figure was 63 percent. Consequently, there is a growing need and demand for parental or family-related leaves and more flexible hours.

At the same time, more people are working long hours. Unusually long hours of work result not only from employers' demands but also from the need of families for more income. As well, long hours of work are the consequence of down-sizing; those who remain are expected to do more and often feel less secure. The effects of rapidly changing job prospects are personal as well as society-wide. While people worried about the "empty nest" syndrome in the 1970s and 1980s, the 1990s are marked by an increasing number of young adults who remain or have returned home because they are unemployed or underemployed.

There is a “time crunch” counterpart to the income and jobs polarization described. Family incomes are being squeezed in the 1990s. To the extent that they are being maintained it has been at a cost — the lost time with partners, children, friends and in the community.

If one factor unites the unemployed, the precariously employed, the fully employed, and those who usually work long hours (“the over-employed”), it is stress.

According to a 1992 Statistics Canada survey (reported in *Profiling Canada's Families*, The Vanier Institute of the Family, and the Canadian Committee for the International Year of the Family, 1994), one-third of Canadians say they are constantly under stress, trying to do more than they can handle.

In the middle of a protracted period of high unemployment, it is ironic that large numbers of people in convenience stores, on assembly lines, behind retail counters, in secretarial pools, in management and professional offices are working considerably longer than 40 hours per week. If finding a more equitable distribution of work is the goal, those working long hours and short hours become the principal focal points for change.

One significant element ties those who have too little or no work to those who have too much: increasingly, their situations are involuntary. In turn, this takes its toll not just on people's lives but on society as a whole. More Canadians are experiencing increased stress, whether due to a time crunch or a money crunch.

A growing body of evidence shows that the growth of low wage and insecure work has huge social and economic costs. Far from being a necessary part of a “knowledge based, globalized economy”, a precarious labour market blocks the potential for higher productivity and higher growth that comes from new technology and better forms of work organization. Precarious work and lean production are also greatly undermining the quality of working life.

This shift of jobs from larger to smaller firms is disturbing since, all things being equal, jobs in larger firms are more secure and stable, are better paid, provide more benefits, and offer more training and more opportunities for advancement. Jobs in larger firms are also much more likely to provide access to the rights and benefits and better conditions that are secured through union representation.

The shift of jobs from larger organizations with relatively stable and secure jobs to small, unstable, financially insecure organizations is also taking place in public and social services. Many services are delivered at arms length from governments by small agencies and for profit enterprises. Hit by cuts in public funding and subsidies, social workers, public health nurses and so on are shifting to variable hours, making jobs more precarious, and increasing the intensity of work. Privatization and contracting out of public services usually results in a sharp deterioration in the quality of jobs in terms of pay and working conditions and access to benefits.

Alongside the highly disproportionate growth of precarious “non standard” jobs, job growth has been heavily concentrated in the small firm sector of the economy. This is the result, not just of downsizing and contracting out by larger corporate and public sector employers, but also of the shift of the economy from large scale industrial production to small scale production of private

services. It is also the result of the rapid growth of productivity in the larger firms which are making major investments in new technology and introducing lean production techniques. In manufacturing, communications and transportation, workers in large firms have become much more productive (and stressed), but there are far fewer of them.

Some workers are clearly being marginalized by these trends — most notably the chronically unemployed and under employed. The heaviest burden falls on young people and working women in low and middle income families, as well as on visible minority workers and workers with disabilities. For many, the opportunities for skill development and advancement in the labour market which come with a decent job have largely evaporated. It can be argued that even a bad job is better than no job, but precarious and contingent work is much more often a trap than an opportunity. Such work usually provides little or no training or access to career ladders. The reality is, at best, movement between unemployment and short term, low skill, no future jobs. Ultimately, the casualization of the labour market threatens to create a permanent underclass, as it has in the U.S.

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◆ **Acceleration of the pace of work**

This issue must be viewed in two perspectives — those full time workers left in the workplace after downsizing who now must do the additional work of those jobs that were cut and the workers who now must work two or three part-time jobs spread out during the workday, in many cases spread out geographically from one worksite to another.

Over the years other forces came into play. First, there were technological changes and innovations that allowed for labour savings in the production of goods and expanded the range and sophistication of services available in the economy. This “deindustrialization” of the labour market has led to a more variable pattern in working hours since the process and output of services are, in many cases, less standardized than the assembly lines or batch production common in manufacturing.

Today we seem to be poised on the crest of a renewed concern about working time; about who gets work in our society and how much of it; about hours worked and the time crunch; about the shift from stability to unpredictability; and about the polarization of hours of work.

The paradox of our times is that many Canadians today work long hours while many others have no work at all. Increasingly, people who want full-time, permanent employment have to settle for part-time, temporary or seasonal work. This form of “underemployment” is as troubling as unemployment, since more and more people are relying on these non-standard or contingent jobs.

Counting both full-time and part-time employment, the typical workweek of Canadians has been declining gradually to the current average of 37 hours. This is slightly lower than the standard work week; i.e., the legislated “norm” in each province, which for most Canadians is 40 hours a week or more. But statistics can be deceiving. The prime reason for the decline in average hours of work has been that so many more people are working part-time. Full-time workers have

retained virtually the same average usual work week — just over 42 hours a week — since 1975. Those working part-time average about 15 hours per week.

Two patterns have recently emerged. First, actual hours worked by some full-time workers are now on the increase. Second, most of the new jobs created in Canada have been part-time employment, while most of the loss during the last two recessions has been in full-time work. As a result, today 23 percent of all jobs in the Canadian labour market are part-time, compared with only 14 percent in 1975. Counting part-time jobs produces a higher figure than the figure for persons employed part-time (17%) because part-time jobs are constantly being created and ended, and because many people hold more than one job in any given week.

Hours of work are increasing for some full-time workers while, for others, only part-time work is available. This increased labour market polarization, raises the stakes of winning and losing in the employment lottery. Polarized hours of work mean polarized opportunity and income.

The relationship between employer and employee has undergone very considerable changes in the last generation. New work arrangements are eclipsing yesterday's model of a stable working life. Among the contributing factors and developments are the growth of irregular work shifts, the importance of high fixed costs for some employers, and the impact of technological change on working time.

Weekly hours of work can be structured in different ways. Most jobs have some degree of "give" as to how the working day, week or year is constructed. What is of note is the degree to which working life has become more unpredictable than it was a generation ago. As businesses try to cope with fluctuations in demand with leaner staff complements, one response is to vary, and sometimes to reduce, work hours. In fact, as already indicated, part of the story of the last decade has been the rising relative importance of part-time employment opportunities.

Fewer people have the luxury of a stable nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday job with evenings and weekends at home. Of every 10 Canadian workers, three do not have regular daytime hours. Further, one of every four paid workers does not work a regular weekly work schedule. (A regular pattern of work does not only mean Monday to Friday, nine-to-five.) This means that a quarter of the workforce are on rotating or irregular shifts. For both full-time and part-time jobs, the work pattern is changeable and in some cases prone to uncertainty. Part-time workers in particular are likely to have to adapt to changing work schedules. According to the Statistics Canada 1991 Survey of Work Arrangements, almost half the part-time workforce have variable schedules, compared with 20 percent of full-timers.

The vast majority of people working shifts do so because they have to, not because they want to. Only one in four shift workers says he or she is on that schedule because it makes time for school or family responsibilities or because it offers the opportunity to earn more money. In almost 70 percent of the cases, shift workers say that variable hours are a requirement of the job. This is especially true of shift jobs in continuous process industries, capital-intensive sectors, and public services from power companies and hospitals to police and fire-fighting services.

Variations in consumer preferences and production cycles often oblige employers to change both the number of hours and the timing of shifts from week to week, sometimes with little notice.

Irregular shifts are widely used in the retail and service sectors. Since many part-time employees work such schedules, and most part-timers are women, this raises special difficulties in making child-care arrangements, especially outside the informal care setting. A pioneering example of responding to this dilemma is the day-care center established by the Canadian Auto Workers in Windsor, which operates on a shift schedule.

There has also been a return to longer hours of work. Why would longer hours for current employees be preferable to new hires? Three factors underlie business decisions to require people to work long hours: 1) the fixed costs of hiring an additional person, such as recruitment costs, training costs, and benefit packages; 2) the dictates of the production process; e.g., how to use the capital equipment most efficiently; and 3) the fact that the extra hours worked by many salaried employees are unpaid and therefore a “free good” to the employer.

For the employer, fixed costs are associated with non-wage benefits, which are a growing component of total compensation. Although the term “fringe benefits” is often used, they can add up to one-third of total payroll costs in some firms. Paid time off is the largest component, especially vacation time. Employer-sponsored pension and other related plans (such as health and disability insurance) are the next largest component, followed by legislated payroll taxes for unemployment insurance, provincial health care, workers’ compensation, and the Canada/Quebec Pension Plan. For both hourly paid workers and salaried managerial staff, most of these fixed costs do not increase with long hours, whether paid or unpaid. On the other hand, every new hire can represent a considerable “investment” decision.

Through modern computer and communications technologies, home work is also fast replacing former office based clerical and customer service work. Phone orders for pizza are taken by workers in their own home, and relayed by computer to the ovens. “Teleworking” is particularly advanced among large public sector employers such as the federal government which has moved computers and telecommunication equipment into the homes of workers. Such practices raise complex issues such as how to balance work and family responsibilities and how to limit long hours and split shifts. While welcomed by some, telework can be very isolating and makes workers vulnerable to abuse. One study indicates that federal government employees working with computers at home work an extra 2.5 hours per day. Health and safety is a major concern since few employers are prepared to provide ergonomic home offices. We have been told that employers, in the not too distant future, such as the banks contemplate moving the back office work for credit cards and electronic banking to home based workers. Many may well be “self-employed”. While by no means all teleworkers are self-employed or “dependent contractors”, it is these groups that are the most vulnerable to isolation and exploitation.

Technology and work organizations also play an integral role in decisions about when to hire a new worker. First, costly and sophisticated equipment tends to require an experienced and trained workforce, such training and experience being primarily attained on the job. This “initiation” period translates into a high fixed cost for the employer. A potentially short-lived upturn in production is therefore more likely to result in a more intensive work schedule for the existing group of employees rather than the hiring of additional labour. Until employers are convinced that an upturn in demand will be long-lasting, they will be reluctant — for good reason — to hire and train new employees. “Lumpy” assembly-line production also favours using

overtime rather than hiring new people, because some forms of production can be expanded only by hiring a whole new shift, not an extra four or five people.

Changing technology is an increasingly important factor. While it simplifies some tasks and makes work easier, it can also increase working time; e.g., the laptop or notebook computer that turns dining room table into another office, the fax machine that demands instant response. In a sense, these communications technologies have turned managerial and professional occupations into continuous process jobs. They have raised expectations that work can be accomplished with a faster turnaround time. By stretching human capabilities, technology tends to make people take on more, not less, work than they might have in the past. These developments simply make it harder for persons in some occupations to walk away from a job at the end of the day.

There are, of course, a number of people who find enormous satisfaction in working long hours: the small-business owner pursuing a personal goal, the hard-working lawyer or accountant, the computer enthusiast delighted to be racing down the information highway. In addition, there are those who feel they must prove their loyalty and importance to the organization and others who work long hours simply to maintain the family income, let alone pull ahead.

Though the scale of expansion of part-time work is statistically far more significant, the long-hours story offers a key lever for approaching the future of the Canadian labour market.

Conclusion

Labour's Vision of Education

Labour's oft-repeated uneasiness about greater corporate involvement in education springs from our differences with business on the issues of the purpose of public education. The measure of good education is not primarily its ability to meet the needs of the economy by training future workers. Education has a broader purpose and social obligation. All people, regardless of their status in the economy, have the right to a good education. People are not only workers but also family members, community activists and citizens in an increasingly complex world.

People need a good education in all these aspects of their lives. Society has a collective interest in an educated citizenry particularly now that pluralistic democracy is seriously at risk — not from tinpot dictators but from changes that raise increasing questions about the ability of nation-states to govern in the face of massive transnational corporations. Of the 100 largest economies in the world today, 47 are transnational corporations. The sheer power of the giant corporations has grown not only with their size but also with the technologies they have developed that allow them greater freedom in locating production of goods and the provision of services anywhere in the world. Machine tools in Mexico can be programmed from head offices in Detroit. Local calls to airline reservations offices in Vancouver can be redirected to reservation phonebanks in Barbados.

New "trade" agreements, such as the Canada-U.S. Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), (as well as the Multilateral Agreement on Investments) extend the power of transnationals by limiting the rights of nation-states to regulate corporate behaviour. The ability of Canadians to manage our economy and society for our social

and cultural objectives of justice and equality is at serious risk. Now more than ever we need an educated citizenry to meet these challenges, to help find ways of preserving our democratic rights in the face of massive corporate power. It is for this reason we are so adamant about destreaming and about access for all to excellence in education. This is why we are angered by tuition increases that make post secondary education less available for those of limited incomes. This is why we oppose the underfunding of education that results in large classes and a poorer learning environment, especially for disadvantaged children. This is why we are so troubled by a special education system that consistently fills its top streams with children from the middle and upper middle classes and fills its bottom streams with the working class and the poor. This is why we do not jump up and down in excitement about School Workplace Apprenticeship Programs. There are few jobs anyways for apprentices and such programs too often perpetuate class-based streaming and deny upward mobility to workers already in the workforce. This is why we oppose “back to the basics” initiatives because the “good old days” were not so good unless you were middle class, white and from a British Western European background. The teaching practices and curriculum in these “good old days” were inferior generally to today’s pedagogy and curriculum.

The labour movement wants an education system committed to excellence for all; an education system that is really accountable individually (this does not mean standardized tests) and socially; an education system that helps preserve and strengthen democratic decision-making structures such as school boards rather than by-passing them through privileged business partnerships. No group, whether it be business, labour or others, should have privileged access to the educational system nor a privileged position in shaping the decisions of that system.

Education must not be measured in terms of how well it prepares people for work. Its true measure must be how well it prepares an informed, active and socially conscious citizenry — productive in all aspects of their lives. George Martell, a professor of social science at York University and former City of Toronto school trustee, captured this vision in a speech several years ago (quoted in Davis, 1989, p. 101):

Secretaries and plumbers, steelworkers and retail workers, mechanics and clerks must also be historians and economists, poets and scientists, intellectuals and artists. It is only through these activities that they can be full citizens — capable of powerful and purposeful work and community action. Many workers try to carry on these tasks, but they are running deeply against the grain of what the society expects of them. We have to fight for schools which open our kids to all these activities — to give them a real education.

This, not our preparation of people for work and the economy, has been our failure in the past, and this is our challenge for the future.

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Collaborators in the development of this paper:

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Canadian Federation of Students

Canadian Labour Congress

Canadian Labour Congress Training and Technology Committee

Canadian Union of Public Employees, CUPE

Ontario English Catholic Teachers Association, OECTA

Ontario Secondary School Teachers Federation, OSSTF

Public Service Alliance of Canada, PSAC

United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, UFCW

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