

Guest Editorial

Educating Canadians For the Future

I would like to (discuss) the specific challenges, opportunities and problems the current situation presents for young Canadian men and women. These challenges go beyond those encountered on the labour market. Rapid technological change has necessarily had a major impact on education and of course on our society.

This new era is the result of global changes that are occurring faster than ever before. The job world, in fact our whole culture, is going through a period of transition comparable to the industrial revolution. We are part of an international community that is both more competitive and more interdependent than in the past. The oil crisis in the 70s made this abundantly clear.

Change is the order of the day. Markets rise and fall at an unprecedented rate, and the demand for various skills is constantly changing and shifting.

There is no quick and easy way to deal with this reality, whether we are speaking globally or internationally. However, as a nation and as a Government, we have no right to ignore these facts, and we must acquire the approaches and strategies that will help us to manage change where possible and to avoid being alienated by change.

To deny these new realities would be nothing less than disastrous, not only for Canadians but especially for our Canadian Youth.

The Government must act as a catalyst, helping to define what the challenges are and where our collective responsibilities lie, and helping people understand what kind of opportunities the future holds in store. . . . (A) new culture based on the continuing acquisition of knowledge. . . opens up almost unlimited opportunities for society in general and for the Canadian labour market in particular.

The impact of technology on the job world is one of the main concerns of young Canadians. Our ability to integrate new skills and to create jobs commensurate with those skills is, for our young people, a reflection of our country's success. Success means the ability to adjust to this rapidly changing environment, where competition is becoming increasingly fierce.

If young people do not get adequate training, if they are not provided with the means to adapt themselves, they will simply not be in a position to preserve Canada's prosperity and secure our economic future. The Prime Minister recognizes it is urgent to properly integrate our young people into the labour force and, in that respect, . . . this Government's decision to link up the youth component to the Department responsible for employment matters is significant.

This new reality must also allow for participation by visible minorities, natives and the handicapped, who are an integral part of the gainfully employed population. I am committed to doing everything humanly possible to promote the interests of those groups, feeling as I do that there can be no genuine economic, social, and cultural progress without the full participation of all Canadian men and women.

New technologies in changing markets and the need for more advanced skills are the current challenges which our young people, who will be part of our labour force, should be able to take up. The training of that new, more flexible manpower in possession of more specialized knowledge, will require the co-operation of the young people themselves, of the teachers, the labour unions, the private sector, and all levels of Government.

The new technological era also entails other changes, new ways of defining work, a different view of hierarchy in the workplace, a new way of managing work and leisure hours. Actually, what we are talking about is a new lifestyle, whence the need for autonomy and innovation.

In the light of these changes, we are reviewing certain programs. In consultation with the provinces, the labour unions, and the business world, we will review such things as the apprenticeship training program, which to a large extent is funded by Employment and Immigration Canada. That review will take place over the next six months, with a view to determining the best possible avenues for getting labour and the training sector closer together.

We are also looking at measures to fight against illiteracy in Canada. In the same optic, we are considering action to encourage young people to remain in school as long as possible, and measures to prevent drug abuse and help young offenders.

To promote access to employment, we are constantly improving our occupational counselling and employment information programs and we are developing new training tools for occupational counsellors. In this regard, we are looking at the co-operation mechanisms between Employment and Immigration Canada and the provincial Departments of Education. In the same optic, the National Conference on Secondary Education, announced by the Prime Minister for the beginning of 1987, and the proposed National Advisory Board for Industrial Technology will help to define the concepts, to develop the new mechanisms, and to determine the levels of cooperation required for a better management of changes in these sectors.

Major progress was made in this direction a little over a year ago when the Canadian Jobs Strategy was implemented. This strategy represents a basic change in the federal policy as concerns training and job creation, especially for young people who, I should point out in passing, are the main users of these programs as a whole.

In summary, I shall be looking with the representatives of the provinces, the leaders in our society and young people at how to answer one basic question among others: what kind of direction do our young people need, not only to move successfully from the academic world into the active world, but also to become the nucleus of a labour force of international standing? The performance of Canada on the international scene is closely dependent on the answer to that question. In the short term, however, we must maintain our efforts in order to solve the unemployment problem among young Canadians, although the demographic process itself should progressively reduce the relative importance of this problem with which all industrialized nations are faced. In the present context, the ultimate irony is that we may face a manpower shortage in the years to come.

Statistics concerning unemployment among young people in all industrialized nations clearly indicate that everywhere governments must step up their effort with a view to integrate young people into the labour force during this transition period. In the United Kingdom, the unemployment rate among young people is nearly 22 percent. In France, it exceeds 25 percent, while in Italy and Spain, it exceeds 35 percent and 43 percent, respectively.

In Canada, the unemployment situation among young people is not as serious as elsewhere, and it is improving. It went from nearly 19 percent down to less than 15 percent over the past 18 months. The cynicism and despair expressed by some of our youth are not as acute as elsewhere and, while travelling throughout this country, I have noted clear signs of increasing assurance and optimism among our young men and women who

are aware that this country belongs to them and who are determined to develop it fully. The situation is not as critical as it is elsewhere, but . . . much remains to be done. The distribution of jobs at the national level is very uneven; youth unemployment varies from around 10 percent, its lowest level, in the Toronto area and goes on to exceed 30 percent in Newfoundland. For native young people, the situation is even worse.

The Government has a duty to identify policies and clarify objectives in order to deal with these problems. Alone, however, it cannot provide easy answers. All sectors have a role to play in helping Canadians adjust to a changing job world, and in its role as national coordinator, the Government must ensure that the measures being taken by various sectors complement each other.

This Government's jobs strategy reflects the realization that solving the problem of youth unemployment does not depend on how many jobs are created but also on the type of jobs, real jobs that are career-oriented, for which real training is provided. The jobs strategy makes it possible to take into account both the technological changes taking place on the labour market and the priorities of each participant. The strategy emphasizes autonomy and innovation, two factors that are now indispensable to economic growth.

The jobs strategy has no connection with any of the so-called band-aid solutions that may have been proposed before.

Taking its cue from this approach, the federal Challenge 86 program, aimed at creating summer jobs for young people, has set long-term objectives. With the support of local businesses and community organizations, Challenge 86 has helped create 90,000 jobs, which in most cases are related to the goals and aspirations of our young people.

The strategy's other programs, which run 12 months a year, are also based on these principles. The Job Entry program features on-the-job training and practical work experience which are a solid basis for young Canadians to begin new careers. Then there is the Innovations program to help those who have creative ideas and projects which propose fresh and innovating solutions to the labour market problems and create openings for technological applications.

(There is also) the importance of finding new ways to instill the spirit of entrepreneurship in the minds of young people. We have already begun to work on this and will soon be in a position to unveil a major program in this field.

New trends are beginning to appear, such as team work and a growing awareness of the importance of quality and flexibility. Unless they can readily adapt to the changing situation and make the best of it, neither young people nor the various labour market interests can ever look forward to a productive future. Only a positive and flexible attitude coupled with long-term planning can foster prosperity among individuals and organizations.

Given the scope of the challenge facing us, it is only through a concerted national effort that we will succeed in fully integrating young people into the economic activities of this country and into society as a whole. For my part, besides defending the cause of young people in Cabinet and encouraging them to take full advantage of all services and programs offered by the federal Government, I will strongly support all measures likely to give youth more opportunities to become active participants.

Mechanisms such as the Canadian Youth Foundation and the Advisory Council of Youth will make it easier for them to be directly involved in the quest for solutions to the employment problems and other questions which concern us all.

The era of new technology offers young Canadians more opportunities for training, employment, and personal development than any other previous period in history. All of us will have to use our minds and creativity to benefit socially and economically from these opportunities.

(We) are living during an exalting period of transition, at a crucial time when we can experiment with new methods and discover new concepts, values, and options to pave the way for a new society where all Canadians will be at home. If all of us, young people, educators, employer organizations, and union leaders, community leaders and elected representatives, are determined to get the most out of these opportunities, we shall prepare a great future for young Canadians and the nation, as a whole.

Finally, I am convinced that, like the previous generations, this one . . . will be able to overcome the obstacles it has inherited from others. Our basic message to young Canadians is that they must remember that Canada is still a country to be built and that they will build it for themselves and in their own image.

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