

Mainstream**Prudence and the part-time worker**

By Tony Carlson

The plight of the part-time worker is suddenly sexy.

As more and more people take jobs that don't require a 40-hour work week, the concern grows that they're not being treated fairly.

Employers, the line goes, have had their way long enough, exploiting the eagerness of many people to have a job, any job. Part-time workers, the argument continues, are notoriously under-compensated, not only in terms of wages, but also as far as benefits go.

Thus the groundswell for mandatory benefit packages gains strength. In Ontario, for instance, an arbitrator recently ruled that 8,000 part-time public servants should have access to the same benefits and job security as full-timers. That includes life, medical, drug, dental and hospital insurance.

Who can argue that such a move isn't in the best interest of part-time workers? Isn't this the kind of first victory that will accelerate the advance of an under-privileged sector of our labor force?

Well, maybe.

But as with anything, there are many sides to the story. Certainly in individual cases, there is no doubt that some part-time workers could be

treated more generously. But the bulk of evidence shows that if mandatory benefits were extended to the private sector, there would be less work and therefore less income for many part-timers.

It's partly a case of what most part-timers themselves expect. More than 70 per cent choose not to work full time. Their lifestyles and income needs are best met by the flexibility that short hours offer.

But more, it's a question of what the market can bear.

Small firms hire more than their share of part-time workers, often to match on-duty staff as closely as possible with the demands of the business which can vary dramatically from season to season, from week to week, even from hour to hour.

Forcing these businesses to pay benefits on top of wages does two things. First, it adds a whole new layer of paperwork for an owner-manager who is already putting in backbreaking hours. (Paperburden is the second most important problem reported by the nation's small firms.) Second, it adds to the cost of employing a person.

The upshot is that the small business operator may decide it's not worth

it to have someone come in a few hours a week. Multiply that by the hundreds of thousands of small businesses in Canada and the implications of such a ruling become apparent.

The effect is similar to that recorded by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business after Unemployment Insurance premiums, and therefore the cost of employing people, skyrocketed two years

ago. CFIB found that 7.4 per cent of respondents to a survey laid off people; 15 per cent postponed hiring; 3.5 per cent replaced workers with machinery.

Clearly, no one is suggesting part-time workers should be kept in a wage/benefits ghetto.

But the watchword must be prudence, for simplistic rulings are almost certain to cause more harm than good.

Houston to run for Reeve

William Houston has announced his intention to run for the office of Reeve. As a councillor for the past three years, Mr. Houston has initiated or been closely involved in a number of projects that he wishes to see through to completion.

One of the most important issues is that of the development of the beach area, the river mouth as a marina, and the Aquasabon Falls and Gorge as a tourist attraction. This undertaking should have a favourable impact on the tourist in-

dustry and local private enterprise and it will be an asset to the local residents.

Another important endeavour is that of Planning: Mr. Houston feels that we need a precise five-year plan for capital replacement and for new purchases. This plan which would be well publicized and would be revised yearly, would

allow for better budget planning and control which, in turn, should keep tax increases to a minimum.

Mr. Houston also feels that Terrace Bay, because of air traffic to and from the U.S. and because of an anticipated increase in water traffic, is in need of a resident Customs and Immigration Officer.

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