Labor Supply Remains Tight Despite Government Efforts

By JANE BECKER
Canadian Press Staff Writer

Despite all efforts to ease it, Canada's labor supply still is stretched taut across most of the country.

Government, business and labor have made various efforts to loosen the strands but with little apparent general success so far.

As of mid - October, only 195,000 of Canada's 7,500,000 workers were unemployed. This was slightly higher than the 171,000 out of work at the same time a year ago but, because the labor force is 340,000 larger this year, it represents a net gain of 316,000 jobs.

Two major attempts to match the supply of labor with demand have been sparked by governments:

—The Manpower Mobility Program, which provides loans or grants to help unemployed move to worker-short areas;

—The federal-provincial vocational education programs, aimed at providing new technical skills for young or displaced workers.

Even officials connected with the programs admit, however, that neither has achieved the early success hoped for.

A Cross-Canada Survey by The Canadian Press shows that as a result employers are scrambling in many areas for the men and women they need, especially in skilled and professional categories.

LOOK ABROAD

Even the federal civil service has had to relax its careful qualification standards in some areas and accept unskilled people for on-the-job training.

Oil companies, facing a serious threat to their development program unless they can assure an adequate supply of professional workers, have been hiring geologists sight unseen from Argentina, Spain and Finland.

A placement agency says a severe shortage of mechanical draftsmen has resulted in new job opportunities for men of 60 and over.

Firms have invaded universities for recruits four months earlier than they did a few years ago, with their eye mainly on engineering graduates. Ken Bradford, the University of Toronto's placement officer, says even arts graduates have a "smorgasbord" choice of jobs available.

The search for skilled secretaries has reopened job opportunities for married women, resulting in an unusual problem for a Toronto firm that provides part-time office help.

It's looking for a way to convince husbands that letting their wives go back to work doesn't necessarily mean fresh chances to be unfaithful.

"We found this a factor in many husbands' opposition to their wives' returning to work," an official said.

RESORT TO WILES

In some cases the pressure has companies scrambling to hold their employees.

One firm, building a $20,000,000 plant in southern Ontario, was flabbergasted to learn that an established local concern was telling employees it thought might quit to join the newcomer: "Don't do it—how do you know the new plant isn't a fly-by-night operation? How do you know how long they'll last?"

In some cases the time for effective action may be already past. United Keno Hill Mines, in the Yukon, says a critical shortage of miners has forced it to curtail underground development with, presumably, the threat of closure in the not-too-distant future.

Aside from local, and usually temporary, unemployment situations such as the closing of the Bell Island iron mine in Newfoundland, the only really soft spot in the labor picture appears in the British Columbia forest industry.

In an October survey the B.C. Forest Industries Council found 3,000 men laid off in an industry normally employing 75,000 because of a drop in the market for B.C. wood products. In the shingles industry, 25 per cent of the work force—about 500 men—were jobless.

FIND NEW JOBS

A substantial drop in housing starts, resulting from tight money, has been blamed for the layoffs, but the scene should brighten when the drain of Expo 67 and centennial construction ends and more funds become available for housing.

In Oshawa, Ont., most of the 2,500 General Motors workers laid off in August because of lower car sales and production switches due to the Canada-U.S. auto pact apparently have resettled quickly.

The United Automobile Workers Union says some are undoubtedly facing hardship, but only 535 were registered with the Canada Manpower Centre in Oshawa for work in October, with a further 225 recommended for government vocational training courses.

The number of job-seekers in the region dropped to 5,800 from 9,400 during October.

The Manpower Mobility Program, which went into effect in January, has helped correlate the supply of workers with the demand, but not even program officials know how much.

Up to Sept. 23 about 5,000 people had been helped to move to new job sites through loans or grants under the program.

PROFESSIONALS SHUN IT

However, only 1,745 of the 2,775 who applied for grants or loans got them, and MMP says it has not yet analyzed its data to find out how well the program has solved area unemployment, or how widened its scope should be if it were to help every unemployed worker.

Aspects of it have come under fire. For one thing, it has been used by few professional people. Some officials say that its provisions—outright grants only for those unemployed for four of the previous six months or moving from a "designated area" and loans at 4.75-per-cent interest for most others—limit its scope and are not always reasonable.

The Economic Council of Canada in its second annual review forecast that the loan part of the program would prove self-defeating, penalizing the enterprising worker who tried to shorten his unemployment time.

Training programs and facilities for the federal-provincial vocational training program have cost more than $1,000,000,000 during the last six years. Yet today Newfoundland is turning down hundreds of applicants for job retraining because the program can't provide facilities for them.

STOP-GAP PLAN

In a recent study of the program across Canada two researchers at the University of Western Ontario in London concluded that a major factor contributing to the shortage of skilled and semi-skilled workers is the failure of government, management and trade unions to accept their share of responsibility jointly in developing manpower.

They called the vocational program largely stop - gap training, with the government apparently unable to bring industry and trade unions together effectively to map long-term strategy.

They also blamed part of the situation on the National Employment Service — now the Canada Manpower Centre —for failing to win the respect of either management or unions.

The Economic Council says the program has been useful in training youngsters coming into the labor force, but for various reasons it has had little effect on the adult working population.

Available training programs are not fully used, partly because few know of them and partly because necessary programs sometimes don't get started since no one is sure which level of government is responsible for them, it says.

ATLANTIC OUTLOOK GOOD

Here are some highlights of the province-by-province picture:

Newfoundland—About 1,600 workers have been affected by mines closures and the U.S. Air Force base shutdown at Stephenville. Many of these have relocated in Ontario. Others will be employed at the giant Churchill Falls power project. There's still a skilled labor shortage.

Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia — Atlantic area unemployment rate of 3.9 per cent in September was the best in years, but this rose to 4.4 per cent by the middle of October. Labor Minister J. E. Blanchard says P.E.I. needs a "crash training program immediately" to supply 1,200 workers for the Island causeway.

Vocational training in Nova Scotia is being stepped up, especially to retrain stevedores. About 500 miners were left jobless when the New Victoria coal mine closed on Cape Breton. About 50 are working at the Louisbourg fort restoration project but most have gone back to mining.

New Brunswick—No labor shortage exists, since the building industry is slack, but courses to train workers for new indutry are badly needed.

Quebec—The labor market is tighter than last year, with skilled machine-shop workers especially scarce. Rates for electricians, plumbers, carpenters and masons are up $1 an hour because of the Expo construction push; other contractors are falling behind schedule because they can't get men. The Quebec construction industry has set up an apprentices commission to give day and night courses in building trades with enrolment of 675.

NO FALL SURPLUS

Ontario—The industry department classifies all Ontario as "in balance," meaning an area unemployment of less than five per cent. In many areas, however, the supply of workers is critical; in Kitchener-Waterloo the unemployment rate is around one per cent and the cities are even faced with providing municipal baby-sitting services for working mothers.

Usual seasonal labor surpluses are almost unknown this year. There's a constant, heavy influx of worker into the Toronto area but, to date, no surplus labor. The government has been looking at possible immigration aids to ease the strain.

Manitoba — Shortages go through all industries. The Winnipeg Manpower Centre has 1,300 vacancies in clothing manufacturing and only 150 applicants. Only 1.6 per cent of the labor force is unemployed. Manitoba businessmen and provincial immigration officials plan a recruiting trip to Britain and Europe, with employers helping repay federal passage loans for new workers, and providing grants equal to a month's salary.

Saskatchewan—Government pays full passage for dentists, engineers, nurses and other professional people coming to work in the province. Unemployment is less than one per cent, with a notable shortage of good female secretarial help. More than 700 Indians and Metis have been placed in jobs recently, and the province hopes this will reach 1,500 by the year-end.

Alberta—Plenty of unskilled help is available, although oil companies are looking across Canada and overseas for professional people. The shortage has led to hefty wage raises, notably in construction and for oil-rig workers. The dean of commerce at the University of Alberta, Hu Harries, says the over-all labor shortage is the prime reason for price rises. The drift from farms to cities is slowing, and new city workers must be recruited elsewhere.

British Columbia — About 3,000 are unemployed in the forest industry. The labor shortage in the mining industry is improving because of the migration of workers to B.C. Increasing activity in northern B.C. has drawn many from Yukon mines.

PROVINCES AGREE

OTTAWA (CP) — Arrangements have been worked out with the provinces to have provincial inspectors assist in administration of the proposed new federal safety code, Labor Minister Nicholson said Tuesday. Speaking to rhe Commons labor committee, he said the federal labor department held full discussions with the provinces when the code was drafted. All had supported the plan.

RE-ELECT MONTREALER

MONTREAL (CP)— John G. Harper of Montreal has been re-elected president of the English Speaking Union of the Commonwealth in Canada, it was announced Tuesday. Other officers elected to the national executive at a meeting in Toronto earlier this month were vice-presidents E. J. Bisiker, Hamilton; Brig. George Grant, Toronto; and Mrs. Louise Savard, Quebec.

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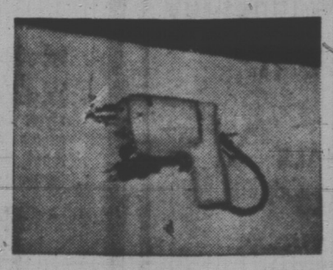

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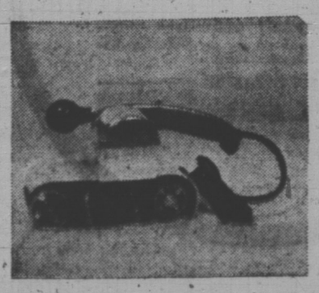

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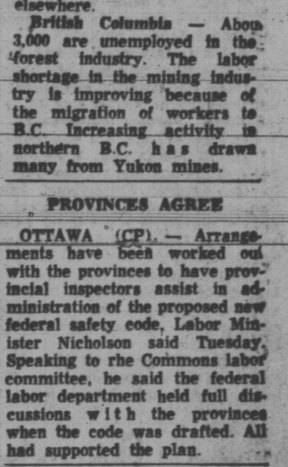

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