Labour Policy for the 21st Century - Two Perspectives

Friday, February 8, 2002 – If you build "human capital", it is said, they will come.

In today's knowledge-based economy, the accent is on investing in people, in the country's stock of human capital, if you will. That's because other forms of investment in the New Economy increasingly depend on the availability of a reliable supply of highly skilled and adaptable knowledge workers. Human capital is the new economic magnet.

This emphasis on investing in human capital was the backdrop for a roundtable organized by the federal Minister of Labour last November. Both Graham Lowe, then Director of CPRN's Work Network, and Denis Saint-Martin, Research Associate in CPRN's Family Network, were invited to make presentations on new directions for labour policy "within a human capital framework".

In his presentation, ***Is Human Capital(ism) Making Labour Policy Obsolete?***, Saint-Martin points to the lack of fit between recent revolutionary changes in markets and technology and traditional institutions and policies that are "path-dependent" (designed for change within familiar assumptions).

The new focus on human capital has bypassed many issues of the old industrial model. The new social investment state emphasizes social cohesion and active participation in the labour market as objectives. Children are future bearers of human capital and policy takes a long-term view of both costs and benefits.

Saint-Martin says that the goal of "more jobs" gives way to the goal of "better jobs", when labour policy recognizes that the quality of work is the vital link between economic and social goals, between competitiveness and cohesion.

You can access or download a Powerpoint version of his remarks by clicking here.

Also, watch for a new paper on these themes, ***Welfare State Redesign and Social Citizenship***, by Jane Jenson and Denis Saint-Martin, due this Spring.

In ***Employment Relationships as the Centrepiece of a New Labour Policy Paradigm***, Graham Lowe argues public policy has traditionally chosen to address workplace issues through occupational health and safety, employment standards, employment and pay equity, and labour legislation. There is little consensus on the role of policy beyond these areas. As a result, major changes in the world of work - in employment relationships and work arrangements - are not being addressed.

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The quality of employment relationships (employer to employee, colleague to colleague, the culture of the workplace) affect everything from job satisfaction and work/life balance to productivity. This makes today's workplace, according to Lowe, a vital site for reaching multiple policy goals. A workplace focus for policy fosters innovation, productivity, skill development, learning, health, rights, equity, and family life. It also implies renegotiating the traditional roles of employers (who have become important policy agents), governments and other stakeholders.

You can access or download a Powerpoint version of his presentation by clicking here.

LMDA Conference Update

There are still some openings for delegates to a conference on **Active Labour Market Policy in Canada: Lessons From the Labour Market Development Agreements**.

The conference is hosted by CPRN and sponsored by Alberta Human Resources and Employment, and takes place at the Telus Centre in Edmonton, February 22-23, 2002.
There is no registration fee, but delegates are responsible for their own travel and accommodation.

The conference will provide an opportunity to discuss the challenges and opportunities facing active labour market policies in Canada, to take stock of the LMDA experience, and to discuss best practices and innovative programming from across the country.

For further information on the conference agenda and registration forms, please contact Grant Schellenberg, Director of the Work Network, by e-mail at gschellenberg@cprn.org

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