

## A NEW ROLE FOR THE CHA?

### The Future of History in Canada: Human Resource Management

by Paul Laverdure.

For the past ten years, I have seen more and more graduate history students admitted into University programmes and more and more history graduates coming onto the market. Universities and history departments, I understand, are desperate for the higher student head count in order to justify if not increase their budgets.

Yet, teaching positions in history remain rare. The oft-predicted 1990s boom in hiring because of retirements and deaths is a bust, because these same universities and departments have been forced to cut or delay positions.

The oversupply and unemployment of highly qualified teachers of history—even those with doctorates—is seen as a major problem and a waste of historical talent.

This crisis can be overcome; it demands a different point of view.

What we really have is historians ready and willing to work as historians, not just as teachers of history or as government administrators.

We must look at history as it is; work, not just a pastime or an intellectual hobby or an adjunct to some other discipline such as teaching, but also as a business. Historians who teach, research, translate, or write history are in the business of history. If recent graduates are to remain in the business and therefore enrich us all with their talents and their findings, they need a way to make enough money to keep them in history.

What we need is a different way to manage the human resources available to the historical profession; we need structures to allow historians to work as historians, to be in the business of history.

What are the structures necessary to any

business?

To survive, every business should have legal and accounting advice.

Historians, free-lance and teaching, should therefore have access to experts in copyright, contract, and small business law. Historians, free-lance or teaching, should also have proper specialized tax and accounting advice, because most historians spend money on travel, books, research and writing and because most historians make money through contracts, as teachers, researchers, and writers.

Yet, historians rarely have the time, contacts, or money to obtain the best advice when they need it, even if they know that they need it.

To survive, every business must take into account the human element of the business. Everyone wants and needs

#### PLEASE NOTE

At its April 1995 meeting the Executive of the CHA decided that, as part of its ongoing effort to protect funding to the social sciences and the humanities, it would ask all recipients (both graduate students and professors) of funding to write their respective MPs, MLAs, MPPs and/or MNAs explaining why it is both relevant and important that such funding is protected.

Meanwhile, congratulations are to be extended to the following recipients of SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellowships: William C. Wicken, François Guérard, Karin Y. Maag, Geneviève Postolec, William D. Acres, Patrick R.N. Carter, Valerie E. Frith, Natsu Hattori, Andrew C. Holman, Martin Horn, Marven H. Krug, Terence D. Martin, Edgar-André P. Montigny, Cecilia Morgan, André H. Schmid, Peter G. Geller, Hendrik Kraay, Walter J. Vancst, Joseph J. Zizek and Lorne Hammond.

#### VEUILLEZ PRENDRE NOTE

Toujours soucieux de protéger les subventions versées aux sciences sociales et aux humanités, le comité exécutif de la S.H.C. a décidé, lors de sa réunion d'avril 1995, de demander à tous les récipiendaires de subventions (étudiants diplômés et professeurs) d'écrire à leurs députés et représentants que de telles subventions soient maintenues.

Par ailleurs, nous aimerions féliciter les personnes suivantes, qui ont reçu des bourses post-doctorales du CRSH: William C. Wicken, François Guérard, Karin Y. Maag, Geneviève Postolec, William D. Acres, Patrick R.N. Carter, Valerie E. Frith, Natsu Hattori, Andrew C. Holman, Martin Horn, Marven H. Krug, Terence D. Martin, Edgar-André P. Montigny, Cecilia Morgan, André H. Schmid, Peter G. Geller, Hendrik Kraay, Walter J. Vanast, Joseph J. Zizek et Lorne Hammond.

vacations, sick leave, and other benefits. Benefits actually comprise thirty or more percent of a business's costs: term and disability insurance, holidays, educational opportunities, work-related legal support, even dental benefits, and, of course, standard deductions for pension and unemployment funds. Since historians traditionally taught or worked for government, they often happily received employee benefits as teachers or government employees.

More and more recent history graduates do not work for traditional employers. Instead, more and more recent history graduates are scrambling to make ends meet from one research, writing, teaching, or publishing contract to another. Recent graduates, by default, are working for themselves and are suffering the same problems as small businesses and independent or contract workers; if their health breaks even for a few weeks, then work and savings are lost. Benefits are usually too expensive and are out of reach of the individual historian.

Anyone in business also has direct overhead costs: office space--even a spare bedroom--utilities, secretaries, clerks, translators, editors, telephones, photocopying, faxes, computers, and general office supplies.

To pay for these costs, recently graduated historians must act like a business and form a business plan, establish accounting records, find employees, establish cash flow, open credit lines, and negotiate bank loans.

Generally, most recent graduates do not know how to run a business and, even if they did know, could not get bank financing while paying monumental student loans coming due within twelve months of graduation.

The Canadian Historical Association has long reflected its membership and has been concerned with the historian as employee: as teacher or as official historian for government or other large institutions. The journals, the booklets, this bulletin, our meetings: most of our continuing education and information is geared toward better research, writing, and teaching. As such the CHA has helped to improve the history we historians offer to the public. And the CHA already offers other services, notably some forms of legal advice in relation to universities or publishing.

Now here's a possible solution. Now that the demographics of history are changing towards self-employed, contract, or freelance historians, for the good of the historical profession as a whole, the CHA could move into the areas of service for these new members. Using the weight of its membership, the CHA can be a powerful business association. It can negotiate favourable group insurance rates (as does the American Historical Association), offer specialized accounting, legal, editorial, translation, and secretarial help (as do other professional

organizations), establish standard research, writing, and publishing contracts (as does the Canadian Authors Association), and offer seminars in administration geared for the needs of its members (as does the Canadian Archivists Association). The CHA could also negotiate credit lines or credit cards with a bank at a favourable rate, sponsor historians' small businesses in their dealings with an approved bank and negotiate a standard bank loan procedure for historians. It would be worth the bank's time knowing that the administration costs of all of these small loans could be consolidated into a single account under the CHA umbrella.

Naturally, the CHA should look at its present fee structure and find out what it can do with its present budget (making contacts, recommending banks, insurance, legal, or accounting services) and what it could do with an increase in its professional fees (provide services or seminars).

Unfortunately, if the recession in our educational institutions continues, there will be fewer graduates staying in the business and perhaps fewer historians overall. By helping new historians to start and to stay in the business, the Canadian Historical Association will ensure that the quality of history already present in Canada will continue and will continue to improve.

The unemployment crisis in teaching or government might actually force us to change our perspectives and even help more historians do history as their main day-to-day work, instead of going into teaching or administration.

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## Société des professeurs d'histoire du Québec Congrès 1995

Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Québec

C'est à l'Hôtel Valleyfield Delta (centre municipal des congrès) que se tiendra les 19, 20, 21 et 22 octobre 1995 le 33<sup>e</sup> congrès de la Société des professeurs d'histoire du Québec (S.P.H.Q.). Pour plus de renseignements: Alain Saucier, Trésorier, 321 Armand-Mallette, Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, Qc, J6T 6C8, tél: (514) 373-9744; télécopieur: (514) 373-0393.