

# Work, Age, and Social Justice



The origins of mandatory retirement at age 65 can be traced back to Bismarck in nineteenth-century

Germany, whose scheme to insure workers against accident, sickness, and old age became a model for the industrial world. In that time, a person at the age of 65 was very close to the end of his/her days, and was not likely to be in good physical shape. Today, more than a century later, life expectancy is not only longer, but on average a person's health is much better. In other words, an individual at the age of 65 has a strong likelihood of being in full vigor, and, with years of experience to draw on, of having much of value to contribute to Canadian society. Instead, as matters stand at present, such a person is shunted aside as no longer having the right to continue as a full-fledged member of the workforce. From a

concern to provide security for a person's last years, society has jumped to the conclusion that the old no longer have a meaningful role to play. A contributing factor to this development has been the accelerating pace of technological change, a trend which favors the young in the workforce. Through changing times and social conditions, a measure that was introduced as a humanitarian reform, has become a means of discrimination against the very element in our society that is best equipped to provide maturity and balance in running its affairs.

Even in the strict economic sense, mandatory retirement makes no sense. At the rate that our population is aging, it is forecast that by early in the next century, mandatory retirement at age 65 will result in more people on pensions than in the workplace. As this reality looms ever closer, pensions

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# User Fees At The National Archives! - What Next?

There was a time when we used to boast about our national archives. Everywhere we went around the world, no other depositories could measure up to our unlimited, free access. Indeed, we never even used the word free, we simply assumed it. Well, if Treasury Board is to have its way that is about to change. The C.H.A. has been advised that Treasury Board has instructed the NAC to prepare to implement user fees. While there is no information about incidence and levels of fees, our colleague, Dr. Jean-Pierre Wallot, the National Archivist, is obliged to prepare proposals to implement this directive.

Our famous twenty-four hour access has already been sacrificed to the accountants. Without any direct

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## Call For Papers

### 18th International Congress of Historical Sciences Montreal: 27 August - 3 September 1995

*18th International Congress of Historical Sciences*

In 1995, the Canadian Historical Association will host the 18th International Congress of Historical Sciences. With headquarters in Paris and Geneva, the Comité International des Sciences Historiques (CISH)/International Committee of Historical Sciences holds a Congress every five years; the last meetings were

held in Madrid (1990) and Stuttgart (1985) and Montreal will represent only the second time that the Congress has been held outside Europe (San Francisco 1975). Some 3000 historians are expected to attend the sessions which will be held in the Montreal Convention Centre and the Université du Québec à Montréal, both located in downtown Montreal. The official languages of the Montreal meetings will be French and

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are being curtailed. The sensible answer, of course, is to keep people economically productive as long as they are able and willing.

The argument that the old should give way to the young when jobs are scarce is based on faulty, or at least incomplete, logic. For one thing, it assumes a finite number of stable jobs that can be passed on through the generations. The reality, of course, is quite otherwise, as new technology and changing priorities present new opportunities, even as obsolescence and evolving social priorities cause other jobs to disappear. For another thing, it overlooks the fact that in certain fields knowledge and expertise are cumulative, so that the young, no matter how brilliant, cannot immediately fill their elders' shoes. Education and statesmanship (including politics)

are two fields where this is particularly true. In other words, the job scene is far too complex for a single, overarching rule such as mandatory retirement at a specified age, to be anything other than an instrument for imposing economic and social inequities.

This is particularly evident in the case of women. Because of family responsibilities, most women have interrupted patterns of employment in the workplace. When they return after attending to domestic duties, they are usually seriously disadvantaged in their earning capacities; it is not coincidence that by far the greatest number of retired poor in Canada are women. For many of them, continuing to work after age 65 is a simple necessity.

Mandatory retirement is not the universal rule in Canada. It is not the law in Quebec, Manitoba, or New Brunswick. It is not practiced in the

Federal civil service, nor in some provincial civil services, such as that of Alberta. In the United States, the retirement age is currently set at 70, and is not rigorously followed. Consideration is being given to abolishing mandatory retirement altogether in 1994. Australia has long since taken the step: its human rights provisions against discrimination on the basis of age are rigorous, and a person works as long as individual capacities allow, or circumstances call for.

The social considerations that inspired mandatory retirement at age 65 a century ago either no longer exist in Canada or are so altered as to make the measure an instrument for serious social injustice.

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## Prizes and Scholarships

The Council on Peace Research in History invites submissions for the Charles DeBenedetti Prize, to be given to the author or authors of an outstanding journal article published in English during 1991 or 1992, which deals with peace history. This may include articles focusing on the history of peace movements, the responses of individuals to peace and war issues, the relationship between peace movements and other reform activities, comparative analyses, and quantitative studies. Submit in triplicate to Dr. Frances Early, History Department, Mount Saint Vincent University, 166 Bedford Highway, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3M 2J6.

The Forest History Society announces the availability of Alfred D. Bell, Jr. travel grants for 1993. Those wishing to study at the Society's library and archives may receive up to \$750 in support of travel and lodging expenses. For information on the Society's holdings and application procedures, write to Bell Travel Grants, Forest History Society,

701 Vickers Avenue, Durham, NC 27701, US or call (919) 682-9319.

The Intercultural/Interregional Exchange Program of the Association for Canadian Studies is designed to promote opportunities for teaching and learning about Canada by exchanging, popularizing and disseminating information on an intercultural and interregional basis. The institutions receiving the awards will fulfill the objectives of the enrichment program through visits by scholars, teachers, students, and public figures who will present formal or public lectures, or both, and participate in teaching activities or provide the focus for seminars, or both. Only transportation and accommodation costs can be reimbursed. For activities taking place between January 1 and March 31, 1993, proposals will be accepted until December 15, 1992. To obtain further information or application forms please write to: Association for Canadian Studies, P.O. Box 8888, Station A, Montréal, Québec, H3C 3P8. Tel. (514) 987-7784.