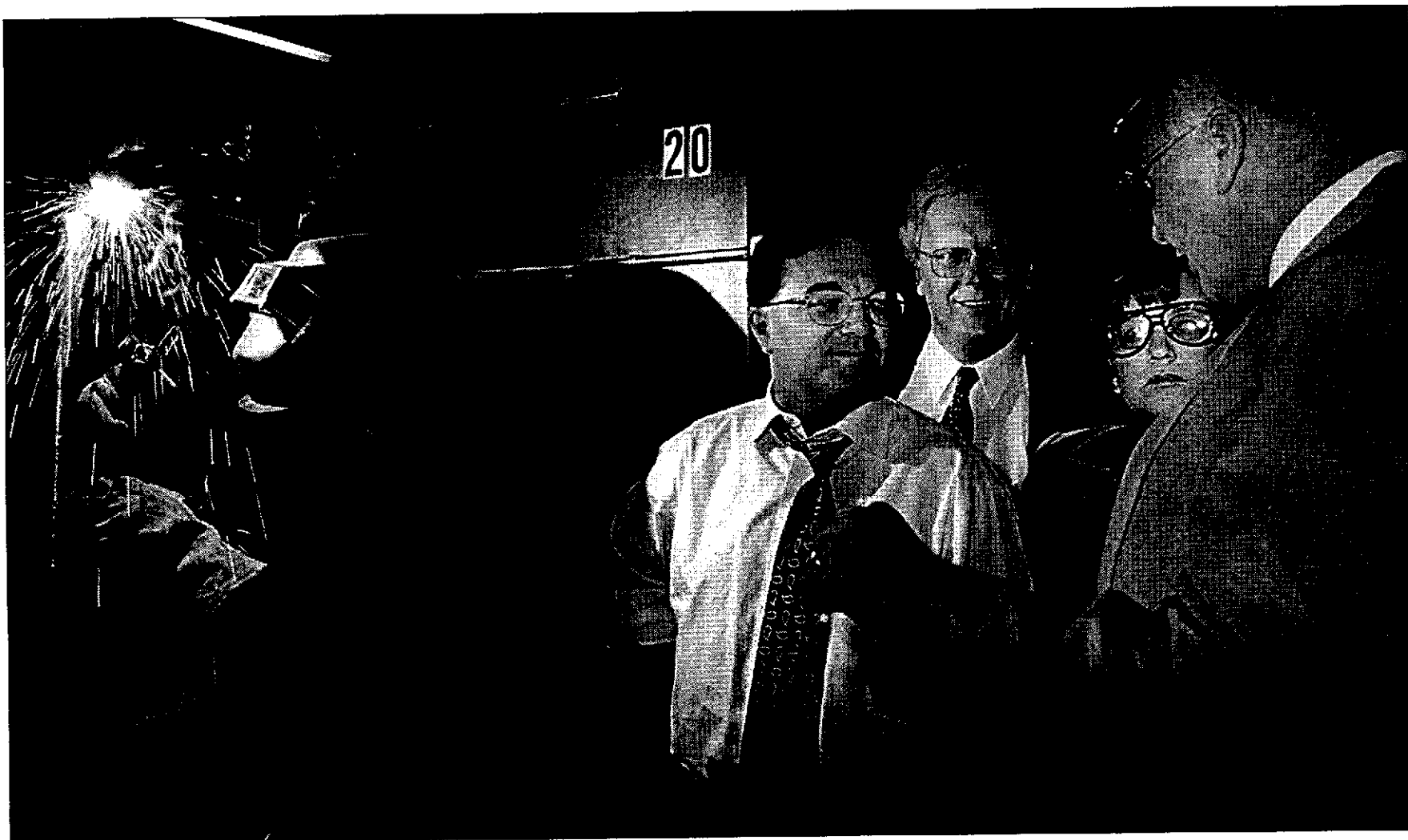


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BUSINESS

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Ken Tucker, right, has the attention of labour minister Jim Flaherty, centre, during yesterday's tour. Others in the picture are: student Larry Dicy welding at left, along with Hamilton Mountain MPP Trevor Pettit and Hamilton West MPP Lillian Ross. Ron Pozzer, The Spectator

A made-in-Hamilton solution

Ken Tucker's idea for top-flight training wows them at home. Now the Tory government is interested in the details.

By JOHN BURMAN
 The Spectator

Ken Tucker has an idea Ontario Labour Minister Jim Flaherty likes.

Tucker's Advanced Welding Techniques school on Upper Wellington Street in Hamilton turns out skilled welders — in two shifts, 17 hours a day — in four weeks.

These welders — 465 graduates working full-time in 27 months, 60 still enrolled and another 655 candidates certified for National Steel Car last year — walk out Tucker's door with specific skills that industry wants today, not the skills sought on the shop floor 10 years ago.

How'd Tucker do that in the 27 months his school has been open? That's what Flaherty came to the school to find out yesterday.

"I have learned something here,"

Flaherty said after a tour of the shop and a closed-door meeting with Tucker.

Flaherty said his ministry and the provincial ministry of education are in the midst of a review of the Ontario apprenticeship program and he is gathering information on training.

He said he is "interested in learning what works and what does not work in training. This school is very efficient. It works."

It works, said Flaherty, because the school goes out and researches what industry needs now and designs courses to suit those needs.

"He is not training people for jobs that may or may not be there."

Tucker believes short programs geared to industry needs are the best way to teach skills.

Although he says he is not trying to take away from college technical programs, he believes teaching skills in shifts round the clock and turning out graduates in four weeks is the way to go.

"School instructors won't teach in shifts. Schools won't do short programs. They prefer to do 20-week programs we can teach in four."

Flaherty visited the school with

ADVANCED WELDING TECHNIQUES INC.

WHAT: Welding training and skills-certification school.
OWNERS: Ken and Jeanene Tucker
WHERE: 1016 Upper Wellington St., Hamilton.
PHONE: 575-8311 or 1-800-794-7840
FAX: 662-6986
E-MAIL: advweld@advweldtech.com or tuck@worldchat.com
WEB SITE: www.advweldtech.com

Hamilton West MPP Lillian Ross and her Hamilton Mountain counterpart, Trevor Pettit.

He ducked sparks and acrid smoke in a tour of the busy shop-classroom and spoke briefly with students and graduates.

"This school is exceptional in that it looks to local business needs to determine its training," said Flaherty.

Tucker is afraid Canada, and Ontario, are falling behind the rest of the world in technical training.

"I told (Flaherty) this is an awful

time to be cutting budgets for technical training in the education system.

"In terms of needs for these skills, this is the absolute worst time to be cutting training budgets in the schools.

"I told him Canada was fourth in training in the world in 1972 and now we are 27th."

Tucker, a steam fitter by trade who turned to organizing and operating welding courses several years ago, has taught courses for National Steel Car, Ontario Hydro's Bruce nuclear power plant and done training work for a Procter and Gamble project in China.

The school, with 10 instructors and 10 staff, draws trainees and workers in need of upgrading from an area bounded by Owen Sound, Brantford, Niagara Falls and Oakville.

It also provides in-shop training for companies like Budd Automotive in Kitchener and Freightliner Trucks in St. Thomas.

"But, (any) training program is not complete until the person is on the job," says Tucker.

"It is not good enough to just teach 'em. You have to be there for them, help with finding a job and help them if they need brushing up."