

Unemployment among Youth

This is possible; I do not challenge this statement but I suggest that the number of jobs is not increasing fast enough to meet the demand of qualified persons that could work and participate in the economic development of our country and insure greater prosperity to all of us.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, as I have said before and say again tonight, we should reconstruct our policy if possible and if it is the government's wish. We have put all our eggs in the same basket; as of 1960, we have witnessed a rush towards education which was supposed to solve all problems. We would say to the young: Get an education. Once you have your diploma you will be able to enter the labour market and earn a decent living.

At that time, we were able to use data from previous years to make such statements. I think these were made in good faith, but I deplore as I did at that time that provinces spent the most part of their budget on education and that they neglected to develop industry and the public sector so as to create jobs for young people who would complete their education. Unfortunately, they have been caused to miss the boat, because we neglected to act in that field.

One of the solutions that we would implement right away in order to allow young people to enter the work force as soon as possible would be to lower the age of eligibility to pension from 65 to 60. Of the numerous letters that I have been receiving about this subject, only one was written by a person who asked not to lower the age of eligibility to 60 because he wishes to continue working. He will always remain free to work until he is 72, if he wants to.

Saturday, I met a man of 74 in Saint-Michel-de-Bellechasse in my constituency, who is a plasterer and will not "give up". He wants to do plastering. That is his business, but it does not prevent him from receiving an old age security pension. However, there are 60-year old people who cannot do that type of work, and who are in need.

My eminently practical suggestion should be accepted, and the act should be changed in order for people 60 years old and over to receive an old age security pension so that jobs may be freed and young people may have a chance to enter the labour market.

I feel this would be good policy, as young people are full of energy, and if they do not do good they will do bad. This is the way I was, and I do not think that today's youth is any different. Once you reach a certain age your experience of life makes you a little more settled. You can be idle without putting your time to bad use.

This is why I feel we should change the act as soon as possible.

Mr. Speaker, here is another means to solve this serious problem: to increase the budget for public works. Several projects could be carried out and used to advantage by the people. We have several at present under the Local Initiatives Program, a program which in most cases has been welcomed by the population, although it is only seasonal. We should try to make it more permanent, to the extent that it meets the needs of the people.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

[English]

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for not taking the opportunity of staying in the House all day and listening to the contributions made by various hon. members on the opposition motion proposed by the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) which reads:

That this House regrets the failure of the government to produce a comprehensive and coherent program to deal with the growing unemployment among our young people and its disregard of youth's legitimate aspirations.

In introducing the subject I think the hon. member has given members from all parties an opportunity to express their opinions on what I believe to be one of the most serious problems of the day and certainly of the decade. In the four or five speeches that I have listened to, however, I have noted that not too much distinction has been made between university students, young people, young married people, between unemployment as a whole and unemployment as it relates to certain categories of the population, in this case young people.

Statistics bore me, as I am sure they bore most people, but there are a few that I should like to put on record in light of some of the statements that have been made. Before doing so, however, I would like to take the opportunity of enunciating my own philosophy as Minister of Manpower and Immigration.

In his opening remarks the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville quite properly and quite astutely anticipated what argument would be advanced because it is a logical argument, and that is, the peculiar, unique fact that in Canada at the present moment we are, and for a few more years we will be, experiencing the largest growing work force amongst young people in the world. This goes back to the years after the war when so many of our young people came back to set up family life. The fact remains that the growth in young people in the work force in Canada is greater than in any other industrialized society. This by itself is not a very good excuse. As a government, as a nation, we have a responsibility in light of this peculiarity, I might say, in the work force to try and meet the challenge.

• (2050)

In 1965, the House leader piloted through the House of Commons the Department of Manpower Act, which department I now have the privilege of administering. As far back as 1965 the department was fairly well oriented toward the work force as it was then composed. I do not think the characteristics and problems of the work force today are quite the same. This is reflected in my bringing forth Bill C-195 which is presently in committee and should be before the House any day for third reading.

Before we talk about manpower in the future, the potential of the department and where we should and might be going with a proper degree of co-operation, I want to point out that the growth in employment over the past ten years of those between the ages of 14 and 24, which is the group of youngsters we are talking about today, has been 57.8 per cent, compared to a rise of only 33.4 per cent in employment for all other ages. This is hardly a record of a government that has been callous, negligent or unaware