

Adjournment Debate

which is, let me remind you, a joint federal-provincial program, have been rejected.

This goes to show, Madam Speaker, that this is a very discriminatory program. I would like to remind the House that the members for Saint-Léonard and Saint-Henri—Westmount have tabled petitions on that subject. They decided to represent the workers so that the government, Tory in those days, would remedy the situation.

There is an enormous consensus in Montreal. The mayor, unions, employers, and naturally workers, all pray that a much-wanted and almost urgent modification be implemented very soon. At the end of my speech, the minister suggested I table a private member's bill. You all know how much I always make it my duty to please the Deputy Prime Minister so I am happy to announce that I will indeed be tabling a private member's bill. As concerns the respect for workers, the challenge is now to find out if the government majority will be consistent, will stand by the Bloc Québécois, will support that bill and make sure it is votable so that we can put an end to that unacceptable discrimination as the various sectors of the Montreal community have requested.

[English]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development): Madam Speaker, the hon. member stated that the program for older worker adjustment, known as POWA, discriminates against Montreal.

I would like to make a very strong case that it is not the case at all.

The program for older worker adjustment is a program designed to help older workers who have been involved in major permanent layoffs and who have little chance of finding re-employment.

Major layoffs are defined according to the size of the community. In larger communities such as those of over 500,000 inhabitants a major layoff would involve at least 100 workers. In smaller communities such as those with a population of under 10,000 a major layoff would involve at least 20 workers.

POWA does not discriminate against Montreal compared with other cities. The same guidelines are applied across the country.

The POWA eligibility criteria were negotiated with the government of Quebec and are contained in the Canada/Quebec POWA framework agreement. Similar POWA eligibility criteria are contained in the other federal-provincial agreements.

POWA criteria were developed to take into account the economic significance of the layoffs for the local community and to reflect the fact that older workers who are laid off in smaller communities have fewer re-employment opportunities than workers in the larger labour market.

Under POWA 441 major layoffs have been designated in the province of Quebec. Annuities have been purchased for 3,842 eligible older workers. The federal and Quebec governments have spent \$160 million to purchase these annuities.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): It being 7.03 p.m. the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7.03 p.m.)