

*Government Orders*

What I am about to say is not a challenge to the member in the least. She made a statement about lumping social policy and economics together. Indeed they are an interdependent coupling.

My concern is the rhetorical piece that is the red book for me does not have the economic elements within it that satisfy what we must do for Canadians to get them back to work.

My daughter is 22 years old and does not have a job, although she has a university education. She says: "Mom, please do not come back home and say you can do nothing". It is the rhetoric that is my concern. If we are going to co-operate it is incumbent upon us to look at economic policies and marry that with social policy. That is how I hope we can co-operate in this House.

In my view the debate has helped to push us along that path.

**Ms. Fry:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to hear that the hon. member and I have much in common. I have a 25 year old who has a university education and not able to find work either. We have all come here with the same bottom line. We are all looking for the same things.

I do take exception to the fact that the hon. member said the red book is long on rhetoric. The red book is very long on specifics. These are the plans of action into which we are now moving. The immigration plan is clearly set out the red book; our economy plan is clearly set out in the red book and our social policy is clearly set out the red book.

She has asked that we marry the two and look at a way to bring them together. That is precisely what this motion speaks to.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Mercier (Blainville—Deux—Montagnes):** Mr. Speaker, reading, writing and understanding even a very simple text is still a problem for many of our fellow citizens. The problem is even worse for the illiterate and has a negative impact on the development of our society as a whole. In my speech I would like to expand on the various aspects of this problem.

In this country, one adult out of four can neither read nor write sufficiently well to meet the requirements of daily life. It may seem hard to understand that in 1994, this kind of problem exists, even among young people, since schooling has been compulsory for more than 50 years. In fact, today, a whole generation is paying the price of the school reforms that took place in the 60s.

However, schools are not the only culprits. The current trend towards family dislocation is also to blame. Well-known authors have stressed the major impact of the family environment on the child's ability to learn to read and write.

Finally, the private sector has not played the role assumed by its counterparts in other industrialized countries. Seventy-six

per cent of Canadian businesses with more than 50 employees in Canada have no policy for training human resources.

And last but not least, there is the federal government's responsibility regarding the high rate of illiteracy in Canada.

I would like to start by commenting on the negative impact of federal involvement in this area.

• (1550)

I condemn the almost inevitable inefficiency of a policy where responsibilities and resources must be shared, discussed and fought over by two levels of government: one which has legal jurisdiction over this area, in other words, the provinces, and the other which for years has insisted on invading this area of responsibility in a totally illogical way which also has been very detrimental to our financial resources. This is typical of the federal government.

Ottawa's failure to support literacy in this country includes the poor allocation of federal resources as a result of jurisdictional overlap.

The hundreds of millions of dollars wasted annually as a result of this overlap could have been used, for instance, to create a pre-school network similar to those that exist in many western countries. The positive correlation between early socialization of children and academic achievement has been stressed repeatedly. As the Deputy Prime Minister said last Tuesday, the years between zero and five are critical.

With the money saved, Quebec, if it had a free hand, would have been better able to help organizations engaged in literacy training and occupational training.

In my own riding, for instance, we have a regional adult education and occupational training service provided by the Sainte-Thérèse, Deux-Montagnes et Saint-Eustache school boards. Their budget has just been cut by 13 per cent, despite the magnificent job they are doing.

Changes in the family structure, as I said before, are also responsible for illiteracy. But does Ottawa do enough to adapt to these new structures? To working mothers? To single-parent families? What is the federal government doing to create a genuine daycare network, as an alternative to pre-school establishments? The private sector is not doing enough? That is pretty obvious. But is there not a case for giving them better incentives to do their share in retraining manpower?

In any case, looking for scapegoats is not going to solve the problem. It is high time to put in place what is needed to fight illiteracy.

Need we recall why action is urgently needed; and why illiteracy is a scourge? First of all, illiteracy cuts people off from their culture. That is clear. Knowing how to read and write is the