

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, May 20, 1983

The House met at 11 a.m.

• (1105)

STATEMENTS PURSUANT TO S.O. 21

[English]

LABOUR CONDITIONS

YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Scott Fennell (Ontario): Mr. Speaker, on Monday I spoke to a class of bright, young students at Henry Street High School in Whitby. I was impressed with their intelligence, and disturbed by their anger, for these students, Mr. Speaker, were very angry. Imagine facing a future where there are no jobs, a future where the old rules do not apply.

I want to get some answers to the students' questions. What is the Government going to do about youth unemployment? We all know that it will be over 50 per cent this summer. Yet, when the Opposition asks serious questions of the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy), he will only recite a list of short-term programs instead of long-term solutions. Mr. Speaker, the statistics for youth unemployment prove that these programs are not effective, and the human factor is even more telling.

This is a letter I received from one of my constituents:

I am writing to you and I need assistance. I have a problem. I cannot get a job. I have been unemployed for over a year. I have a bookkeeping certificate and am now taking an accounting course through the Ministry of Education. I am also on the NEED program through Manpower. Nothing. Please is there anything you can do?

The letter was signed "Desperate".

It is time to bring together a task force, with representation from labour, industry, small business and the Provinces, to examine the transition from the post-industrial to the technological era.

The next time I speak to a class of students who are about to start their working lives, I hope the Government will have some answers for them.

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EDUCATION

LEVEL OF ILLITERACY

Mr. Girve Fretz (Erie): Mr. Speaker, it is incredible and tragic that in this day and age, in this era of space travel and electronic wizardry, one out of four people across the Province of Ontario cannot read a simple newspaper article.

Experts speaking recently for the Movement for Canadian Literacy believe that up to 70 per cent of Canadians read so poorly they cannot understand information brochures sent in the mail by various levels of Government. Indeed, there is reason to believe that the problem may be more acute now than ever. The advent of the electronic media has made it easier than ever before to exist from day to day without reading. Use of the telephone saves many poor readers from having to use the rudimentary skills they may have.

The connection between illiteracy and unemployment has been established by many experts in the field of literacy. Illiterate people have difficulty reading newspaper ads for jobs, and health and safety notices at the worksite. Since grade ten, and sometimes grade 12, is required for many technical retraining programs, illiterate adults are denied even this opportunity to improve their lot in life.

Given the seriousness of this situation, perhaps the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) would consider using some of the money allocated to his Department through the Special Recovery Program to initiate literacy programs across the country.

As well, the Minister is aware of organizations in the voluntary sector which are devoted to helping out illiterate Canadians. I would ask him on behalf of these organizations to make sure that any tax regulations affecting the volunteer workers and their organizations are fair and geared to their best interests.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

REQUEST THAT AMENDMENTS TO ACT BE ADOPTED BEFORE
JUNE 4

Mr. Alexandre Cyr (Gaspé): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased with the news that the Bill proposing amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act has been tabled. The proposed changes would confirm the authority of the Employment and Immigration Commission to establish regulatory provisions concerning fishermen's benefits. These provisions differ from those regulating ordinary benefits in order to allow for the specific needs of this particular group. If we authorize the Commission to establish special regulatory provisions for fishermen's benefits, it would also be possible for the Commission to implement the recommendations contained in the Kirby