

Supply

with a lot of workers, those that have less equipment and use less technology than others and give work to more people also pay unemployment insurance premiums. Those companies that hire the most people pay the most in unemployment insurance premiums. So, it is the workers and the companies that pay for unemployment insurance.

Is it normal, and we mentioned that in the minority report we issued with the report of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development, that workers and companies, through the unemployment insurance account, pay more for job stimulation, for employability? The government is drawing more and more on this account, and is withdrawing from contributions to the general fund. It means that workers and companies paying unemployment insurance premiums are doubly hit, doubly penalized.

The whole of society is desperately in need of such jobs—while taxes collected by governments are ever increasing—since a more healthy economy increases the general level of wealth. In addition, it is not the government nor the taxpayers as a whole, but the workers themselves who pay for that.

● (1555)

The minister who, a while ago, made the important point that appropriations do not provide for everything mentioned in the budget, should perhaps answer the following question: When will appropriations and governmental spending reflect the additional \$700 million in cuts to unemployment insurance?

As a matter of fact, the government announced in the throne speech that an additional \$700 million in cuts or 10 per cent of the total contributions, in cuts would be made to unemployment insurance as of July 1996, which means that the year after, additional cuts will amount to \$1.5 billion. We fail to see where the \$700 million will come from, in the appropriations. Highly arbitrary decisions will be made without due consideration. We are told that this is the way things are done, but this is not really the right way.

The minister said earlier that the government had to make tough choices. In the case of employment development, which should be a key concern for a government that was elected on a “jobs, jobs, jobs” platform, we see that, on the contrary, the amounts from general funding have been reduced.

Yet, the new human resources investment fund, which is mentioned in the budget speech but does not appear in the estimates and which includes the appropriations I am referring to, has applications that come directly under provincial jurisdiction. According to a discussion paper distributed across Canada as part of the consultations on social program reform, the possibility of using the UI fund in a more flexible way in order to provide Canadians with better employment assistance will be considered.

In my opinion, the government's intention with respect to this human resources investment fund is to use UI reform to fulfil that mandate. What does it say? “Greater emphasis on employment development services”. “Greater emphasis” requires more money. “For example, initial needs assessment, counselling services, literacy and basic skills training, on-the-job training and experience, child care services and income supplements”. Most of these functions currently come under provincial jurisdiction. It goes on to say, “The Minister of Human Resources Development will define program parameters in the coming months”. It is that simple. The minister has full discretion.

● (1600)

The intention reflected in this appropriation, the budget and government action is that, far from being prepared to give back to Quebec what belonged to it in the first place, namely control over job development and manpower as a whole, the central government has set out to dip into the unemployment insurance fund to invest more money directly in areas of provincial jurisdiction.

In our view, this is unacceptable because it goes not only against the very essence of the distinctness, the uniqueness of Quebec as a people and a nation within Canada, but also against the most basic rules of efficiency, that the people of Quebec have been demanding in strong terms.

Let me remind you that those who need this money, these programs the most include, and there may be more, the 342,000 families on welfare and 320,000 jobless people in Quebec.

The sad truth is that, on the contrary, and I want to emphasize this as strongly as possible, this appropriation which, according to the minister, was reviewed on the basis of efficiency reflects a stubborn and deliberate failure to recognize the basic needs of ordinary people. Such an attitude tells many Quebecers that there is no time to lose, the situation has become so urgent that we can no longer afford to come and plead in this place, year after year, for those who are in the greatest need.

Mr. Mac Harb (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Mercier referred to the control of manpower training. She mentioned in her speech that she wants that control to be a provincial responsibility.

I have a question for the hon. member. Let us assume for a moment that the responsibility for manpower training is left to the provinces. Here, in the national capital region, over 30,000 people come from Quebec to work in Ontario, and vice versa. We often see the need for national standards on training provided to employees. Would the hon. member agree to the development of national standards by all the provinces working together?

Workers in Quebec could decide to work in Alberta, or vice versa, since they would all have received the same training. This would promote manpower mobility from province to province.