

Oral Questions

I hope that we can maintain the same level or better than last year. Reports coming in from some of our offices are reasonably encouraging, but it is hard to tell at this time as most of the students are in school. We really will not know what the actual figures will be until June or early July.

Mr. McGrath: Madam Speaker, my figures are based on the rate. For example, youth unemployment last year was 17.1 per cent but as of April this year it was 21.5 per cent, which represents 624,000 unemployed young people. That does not take into account the students who will be coming onto the job market this month. That is what prompted my question.

CONFERENCE SPONSORED BY NEWFOUNDLAND COUNCIL ON
YOUTH

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Madam Speaker, perhaps I can ask the Minister if the Government intends to assist, in any meaningful way, the Newfoundland and Labrador Youth Advisors Council on Youth which is sponsoring a national conference on youth unemployment in St. John's on August 26, 27 and 28. It intends to invite 20 delegates from each Province and Territory, and has budgeted for \$150,000.

As the Minister knows, this is a Province where unemployment is critically high and the economy is as bad. The Minister has already indicated that he is prepared to support the conference with \$40,000. Is he prepared to go a little further and contact his provincial counterparts so that this conference may become a real, meaningful dialogue on exactly what we intend to do about the phenomenon of youth unemployment as we get into the area of high tech?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, to put the historical record in perspective, I personally supported and recommended the idea for such a conference to the Newfoundland Advisory Council. I met with it some two months ago when I was in Newfoundland and we had a very good discussion about the report it had released. At that time it was simply proposing to undertake a conference within the Province. I felt, as the Hon. Member does, because of the importance of the issue, that we should attempt to get a cross-section of views, attitudes, and recommendations from young people across Canada.

At that time we undertook discussions with the Newfoundland Youth Advisory Council to see if it would organize a national youth employment conference for us. It agreed to do that and we are working together very closely with it and are providing financial support. We would undertake to recommend that, but I would want to assure the Hon. Member, seeing that it was our idea in the first place, we are obviously lending it our full support.

● (1420)

Mr. McGrath: No matter whose idea it was, it was a good idea and it is an idea whose time has come. I am happy to know it is receiving the support of the Minister.

OPENING OF YOUTH EMPLOYMENT CENTRES

Hon. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): The Minister referred to the fact that the statistics regarding student unemployment are not in yet. The Minister knows that the situation is so serious that it requires a bipartisan multi-Government private sector/public sector approach. For example, I have here a memorandum from the Regional Manager of Public Affairs in the Minister's Department to his manager in Charlottetown, regarding the opening of Canada Employment student centres. The memo lists those to be invited and states that Conservative MPs are not to be invited even if the CEC is in their riding. If that is the kind of approach which the Minister has taken to this very serious problem, which is a cause of a great deal of concern, then the Minister can only stand condemned by it. I would like to ask the Minister if that is his policy.

Is it the policy of the Government to exclude Conservative Members of Parliament from supporting young people in their endeavours to find jobs through student employment centres, or whatever? If that is the policy of the Government, then the Government should be widely condemned for it.

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, before the Hon. Member begins to run off at another tangent, let me remind him that it was this Government which last year initiated a major national discussion on the question of youth employment. In fact I presented a policy paper to the provincial Governments, in which the Conservative Party is well represented, upon which we are now trying to base our youth employment strategy which was announced in the budget of the Minister of Finance. We are continuing those meetings with the provincial Governments to see if we can find, as he indicated, a broad based level of support to tackle what is unquestionably a major national priority to help young people get back to work.

As far as that individual memorandum is concerned, my office had nothing to do with it. In fact, if the Hon. Member would talk to his caucus more extensively, he would recognize that many Members of his own caucus have in fact been at openings of youth CEC's.

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SOCIAL SECURITY

PLIGHT OF SINGLE ELDERLY RECIPIENTS

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Kingston and the Islands): Madam Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. The Prime Minister will know that the National Council on Welfare has just published the revised 1983 poverty line, based on Statistics Canada definitions. These figures show that the elderly poor, single elderly people, if they are receiving only the old age pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement, are well below the poverty line. In fact these figures show that they would be more than \$2,000 below the poverty line.