

Government Orders

Suddenly, the government is under attack for not putting enough money into training and employment development. What does the government do? It looks around for a place to find money to pay for training. They want to get back into the training business. They look at the unemployment insurance fund and they decide to take the money from there. It is difficult to take the government seriously when after four years, it has been reducing moneys for employment and for training and then it attacks the unemployment insurance fund to get those moneys.

• (1130)

We are saying yes, more money for training, more money for employment development, but pay for it the way Canadians always paid for it, out of general tax revenues.

We do not ask parents with children to be the sole supporters of education in this country. When we pay for education through taxation, everybody pays. It comes out of general tax revenue. We do not simply say to parents with children going to school: "You must pay for education and others won't". That is because education benefits the whole of society, and training benefits the whole of society. There can be no rationale for saying that just workers and employers should pay for training. Everybody should pay for training, as has always been done, out of general tax revenues.

With respect to reducing the benefits to the unemployed in order to pay for training, let us look at what those benefits are right now. Right now the law says that the unemployment insurance benefits should be 60 per cent of your recent salary—I won't go into the details—up to a maximum of \$363 a week in 1989. The maximum anybody could receive, no matter what their salary, was \$363 a week, but at 60 per cent it could be less.

The average unemployment insurance benefit in 1988 was \$202 a week. It was \$202 a week and we are going to cut it back. What can you buy for \$202 a week? That is less than \$1,000 a month. Most people have to pay \$600 or \$700 a month in rent. What if you are supporting a family and you are getting this average benefit? That is the average benefit, it is not the lowest benefit.

What about a man or a woman with a family to support? They have to pay their rent. They have to buy their groceries. If they have to go to work in a car, they have to pay for their gasoline and the maintenance of their car. They have to pay for their clothing and they have to send their children to school. It is ridiculous to want to cut these benefits. We should be trying to improve them, make them better so that people will be able to pay their bills with their unemployment insurance benefits.

How is the government cutting this? Where is it finding this \$1.5 billion that it is going to take out of the system, out of regular benefits, and put into training? It is going to find that money by first of all making it more difficult to qualify. It is extending the qualification period that you must work in order to be eligible for unemployment insurance, so fewer people will qualify. It is also going to shorten the benefit period. Even if you qualify you will not get benefits as long as you do now, even though you are still unemployed. It is possible that your benefits will run out before you find a job and you will be without benefits.

The government is also increasing the penalties for people who quit their work. Then we get into the problem of whether you quit for just cause or not just cause, but the government is going to get a large sum of money by not providing benefits to people who quit, and the penalty period will be increased up to 12 weeks.

The government is saying that it wants to put more money into training and into employment development. It is going to take it away from the unemployment insurance system. so people will have fewer benefits and it will be more difficult to qualify. At the same time the government is going to terminate its statutory contribution to the unemployment insurance fund. For years and years the unemployment insurance fund, which by the way last year was approximately \$13 billion, has been contributed to by workers who pay so much into the unemployment insurance fund each week that they work, by employers who pay each week into the fund and by the government.

Suddenly the government decides it should spend more money on training. It does not want to take that money out of general revenues and is going to take it out