

Supply

In the interest of our fellow citizens, this bill deserves our support. It is centred on a single and vital objective: jobs that give Canadians, communities and regions real hope for the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the member's speech. I know he is very interested in his riding and I have heard him many times express his concern about the issue of employment in the province of Quebec. I recently had the opportunity to read a report by the Quebec Manufacturers' Association, who said that employment conditions and problems of labour and employability within Quebec were very serious. I would like to get the views of the member.

I understand unemployment insurance benefits in Canada are some of the highest in the western world. Many people feel that because these benefits are inordinately high compared to countries we compete with in international trade, it has created a lower productivity. In view of that, a number of people feel that productivity in Canada has been declining over the last ten years and no less so in Quebec.

A very positive aspect of this legislation would be to increase labour productivity, increase the attractiveness of Canada and of Quebec as a competitive place in which to do business. What we are really looking at is a long term commitment to create a great number of jobs within that province.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Patry: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my Liberal colleague for his question. This new employment insurance reform as proposed by the Minister of Human Resources Development will help us increase productivity in Quebec and across Canada.

There are several very interesting points in this reform; there are the responsibilities we will give to all job seekers. There will be wage subsidies and earnings supplements. I already mentioned self-employment assistance. There will also be partnerships with the provinces, municipalities, and the companies themselves to put people back to work.

• (1550)

I think that this is the most important. There will also be social incentives. Basing the reform on the number of hours of work and on earnings will greatly benefit the Canadian economy. There are inequities in the existing Unemployment Insurance Act in that some people can qualify for UI after working 15 hours a week for 12 weeks, while others who work 14 hours a week in part time jobs, perhaps for several years, have no chance of receiving UI benefits.

This bill will eliminate some inequities. In the case of lower income people, namely those working part time, some 500,000

of them will now be eligible for UI benefits should they need them—although I hope they will keep their jobs for as long as possible.

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my hon. colleague opposite a question.

Given that the opposition motion before us today deals with the perpetuation of duplication and overlap in the area of manpower, how does he react, as a Quebec member representing the interests of Quebec in this House, to the resolution unanimously carried yesterday in the Quebec National Assembly requesting that the federal government withdraw totally and completely from the whole area of occupational training and everything that pertains to it?

First, what is his reaction and, second, how can he reconcile not acceding to the unanimous request or wish expressed yesterday by the National Assembly with regard to this government's so-called good intentions in recognizing Quebec as a distinct society? If the federal government were not to comply with the resolution passed yesterday, how could he reconcile all that, as an elected representative supposedly here to represent the interests of the Quebec people?

Mr. Patry: Mr. Speaker, I wish to thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois for his question.

I think it is relatively easy to reconcile the federal government's position and the interests of the people of Quebec, because our focus is on job creation. I believe that the Quebec government is looking into the matter and that future legislation passed in the National Assembly will also focus on job creation now that the referendum was defeated in Quebec.

As far as our reform proposal is concerned—and you referred to occupational training in particular—we feel that the bill now before the House of Commons makes it quite clear that the government intends to withdraw from occupational training completely.

I think that what must be understood with this bill is that the federal government would like all provincial and territorial governments of Canada to get together and look at how duplication can be eliminated. As I indicated in my remarks, as far as we are concerned, there is no question of us buying any occupational training courses whatsoever as we know them, because we must withdraw from occupational training with the consent of the province of Quebec.

I reach out to my hon. colleague and suggest that he ask his leader, who is very likely to become the next Quebec premier, to be not so kind but rather so wise as to come and sit down with the federal government to negotiate federal-provincial agreements on manpower training.