

National Training Act

There is more than a government pleading poverty here, Mr. Speaker. Here we have a government with a poverty of imagination. Surely this is unforgivable when the lives of so many of our youngest and brightest hopes for the future are at stake. All of us are aware that the post-war generation of skilled trades people who came to Canada from outside North America are now nearing retirement age. The bill refuses to come to grips with this most important issue.

• (1600)

The federal government is quite content to provide direct grants to industry in the hope that it will stimulate training. Yet there is no enthusiasm for employers who see such training only as a cost to them, not a real investment in their labour force. In the past they have found that they can spend time and money training a person, only to have him take a job with their competitors. The only fair way of dealing with this fear is to equalize the costs for all employers who use skilled labour. If skilled workers are trained, and if those who do the training are reimbursed by those who hire the labour, we will quickly have a policy which is both fair and which accurately reflects the demand for such labour. This is known as the grant-levy system. It has been endorsed by the Canadian Labour Congress and it is endorsed by the New Democratic Party. It is unfortunate that the government cannot bring itself to implement this system.

In short, I wonder whether this brand new bill will give us the same old results. Having been active in the educational field for most of my life, I know well the results of such training bills. Some of the results are as follows: institutional training which comes ten years after the need has passed; a lack of confidence in the ability of local and regional authorities to anticipate and deal with current employment demands; a continuance of "beggar the neighbour" employment practices among companies rather than a continuance of a system which gives assurance to companies that training is for their own good and for the common good of the country.

The government could move beyond the less than inspired ad hocery of Bill C-115, beyond work sharing, beyond winter employment projects and the rest of it, and into a planned economy with a full employment goal. However, the job of planning the economy for full employment awaits different ministers with different goals from those of the ones opposite. I will most readily and willingly support such a government.

Hon. J. Robert Howie (York-Sunbury): Mr. Speaker, the bill before us today is intended to ensure the existence of an adequate number of highly skilled workers to meet the needs of the Canadian economy. The basic need of the Canadian economy is to provide over one million jobs for Canadians who are unemployed and to provide thousands more for young Canadians entering the labour market.

The greatest single need in Canada today is a blueprint for the economic recovery of the nation. We need a national development plan of which the measure before us would be an important component. Standing alone, this bill is just one more

good dynamic in a field of unrelated dynamics which have seen our nation plunge into the deepest recession in modern history.

The government's plan for economic development set out in the document entitled "Economic Development for Canada in the 1980s" raises serious concerns about the real commitment to stated policy objectives because of the vague statement of good intentions and promises compared with the absence of hard priorities and current contradictory federal actions. The non-identification of specific problems and opportunities and the apparent lack of appreciation of how relatively little regions have gained from assistance programs are discouraging notes struck in the document. Despite stated commitments, federal regional policy remains unclear and non-specific. The stated federal commitment to co-operation and consultation with the provinces is not reflected in announced policies to deliver programs unilaterally and the announced phase-out of general development agreements.

The ill-conceived consideration of moving the provincial office of the Department of Regional Economic Expansion out of the provincial capital of New Brunswick is one backward step illustrating the point I have just made and emphasizing once again the bull-headed, do-it-yourself attitude of a government on a mad march to nowhere.

Despite the expenditure of very substantial amounts of money over the past 20 years, the have-not provinces of Canada simply have not caught up. The disparity gaps have widened. In 1971, unemployment rates for Canada were 6.2 per cent and in the Atlantic provinces they were 7 per cent. In 1981, unemployment rates in Canada were 7.6 per cent and in the Atlantic provinces they were 11.7 per cent. The gap has widened.

When we compare the personal incomes per capita for Canada and for the Atlantic provinces for 1971 and 1980, we find that Atlantic Canadians earned 71.7 per cent of the national average in 1971 and 72.5 per cent in 1980. The range and value of federal instruments used to promote an economic catch-up by regions of Canada suffering from regional disparities have obviously not been equal to the task, but without them the gap would be widened even more than it is now.

It is very important to have effective job-training programs such as those being announced by the minister, but it is equally important to have jobs for the trainees to go to. With over one million Canadians unemployed and no jobs on the horizon, we must ask ourselves what we are to train Canadians to do. This government has no blueprint for action. It has no industrial recovery program. It has no national development goals or programs. It has no regional goals or objectives. It is a government which is not giving leadership to Canadian people at a time when it is desperately needed.

Indeed, in view of the frequent changes in federal policy, a sustained development effort is difficult and the private sector of the economy finds itself completely frustrated and bewildered. Canada is a country of great riches in terms of our natural resources and our highly educated, hard-working people. We need a national development blueprint to bring together all the resources of the nation and to get our economy