

### *Government Orders*

economy and it is not so easy for people now to look forward to a lifetime of work at the same workplace.

We require of our citizens and of ourselves a lifetime of learning and adaptation, but there are older workers who find themselves trapped. We are all creatures of habit. After spending 25 years or more at one job it is quite a challenge to suddenly be out of a job and faced with finding another job. This is usually a shock to the worker and his family. If it is part of a large lay-off in the community it is a shock to the entire region.

Canadians are resilient. We have adjusted over many decades and I am sure we will be able to do so in the future. This government is certainly not abandoning older workers during the reform of our social security system. They are very much full participants in the reform process.

This stage of social security reform is a learning process and we are learning from the measures we have already taken for older workers. For example, I remind hon. colleagues that the government did not abandon older workers who were hard hit by the decline in a large number of this country's industries. We have seen tremendous dislocation over the last 10 years. We have not and will not abandon those in need. The coming changes will ensure that those in need are protected.

• (1720)

One program that has been most helpful and has come into play in a number of difficult situations is the program for older worker adjustment, commonly known by its acronym POWA. Through absolutely no fault of their own many older workers find themselves out of a job and sadly with very little chance of finding a replacement job. This is where the program for older worker adjustment can be so helpful.

Canadians want us to show compassion for those individuals, those hard working men and women who have contributed to the economy of Canada for the greater part of their lives. Let me emphasize that POWA is not a disincentive to seek work. By helping older workers adjust because they cannot find a job is not keeping them away from the workplace but simply providing a safety net or a bridge until they can make an adjustment or until their old age pension comes into play.

This program is only one of a broad range of options available to older workers. As I say, it is only one measure the government has taken to support older Canadian workers. POWA has been a carefully crafted program that addresses the needs of workers. It is a fine example of government innovation and partnership between the federal government and various provincial governments to provide long term income assistance to older workers with little or no re-employment prospects.

I can say from personal experience and the experience of hundreds indeed thousands of workers in my riding of Algoma that a number of laid off workers have benefited from the program for older worker adjustment. Since 1990 we have seen the loss of nearly 4,000 mining jobs in the community of Elliot Lake. In this group of nearly 4,000 workers many hundreds have been in the awkward age of 55 to 60.

The program for older worker adjustment has been of significant help to many hundreds of laid off workers in Elliot Lake and the north shore region of my riding. While POWA cannot solve the financial problems of every individual family, it can play a major part in making life a lot easier during a very difficult time for these laid off workers.

I would like to point out another example of where this government has exhibited its extreme interest in older workers. In the province of New Brunswick there is the New Brunswick job corps program. It is a proactive program that helps older workers get back into the labour force. It is different from the program for older worker adjustment. It recognizes the need to try different things in different areas and is a newer initiative.

I will explain how the New Brunswick job corps initiative works. I will use the example of Gilles, which is a name I will use for the purpose of this discussion. He is a 53-year old worker who was on social assistance. Like many others his age, he had years of work experience but could no longer find work. At 53 it was very difficult; the new technology had simply pushed him aside. He was in danger of getting caught in the welfare cycle and Gilles being a proud person did not want to be on welfare.

Thanks to the federal government's strategic initiatives program, we have been working in partnership with the New Brunswick government and since last July Gilles has been employed through the New Brunswick job corps. This older worker is now employed by the city of Bathurst in its parks, recreation and tourism department. How does Gilles feel about this? To quote him he says: "I would rather be here than on welfare". I do not think it matters so much the kind of work Gilles is doing.

I am certain all of my hon. colleagues will agree that very few people who find themselves on welfare, family benefits or unemployment insurance actually prefer to receive their income through those programs. As the Prime Minister has often said the very best form of assistance and the best form of income is a job. One can achieve the dignity of bringing home a paycheque with which to purchase the family's food and shelter.

• (1725)

People like Gilles, and there are many thousands, can benefit from the kinds of initiatives this government is bringing forward