

• (1220)

I want to talk a little bit about the Conservatives' policies as they relate to those particular Canadians, and indeed about the lack of policy. We all know that Canadian employers and employees pay roughly \$20 billion toward the unemployment insurance system. That is a lot of money. That money is mainly used for income maintenance.

Why is it if Canadians are unemployed or on welfare, they are being paid to a certain extent to stay home because they cannot find employment, to stay home because they have no hope of finding a job, to stay home because they are not educated in some of the industries that are going to be the main industries of the future? That is a very obvious question that should be asked, and one that we should very comprehensively deal with in this place.

It is important for us as Canadians and as members of Parliament to put forward suggestions. Why is there not a national apprenticeship program in this country to try to help those without the tools to get employment in certain industries to move on to other industries? Is it a fact that a 54-year old man is not capable of being retrained? The pundits say so. I do not agree with that. There are people in this country, no matter what their age, who have the abilities to be trained in a particular area in which jobs may be created.

Why is it that instead of having people collecting unemployment through an income maintenance system they are not asked to go into some sort of co-op system? In such a system we would ask employers across the country, in Ontario for example, whether they would take an unemployed person who is on UI, and has no hope of getting a job, for a certain amount of weeks and months. We would continue to pay that individual's unemployment insurance as we are anyway and they would have the opportunity to go to work every day through a co-op program and learn some other trade. Why is that not possible? Why can we not give Canadians that kind of policy initiative to give them hope?

The government likes to say that there are a lot of Canadians who just do not have the skills, and that is true. However, why do we not put together an initiative to allow Canadians to go into the colleges and universities that are available to us and enter a program that

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would give them the skills to go into the work force at some future date?

We have all the infrastructure, the infrastructure of the colleges and the universities and the infrastructure of the existing business community. It is already there. Why do we continue to just pay income maintenance to Canadians to stay home and collect unemployment and welfare? We could put that kind of initiative together and put those four million Canadians to some use for the good of all of Canada and at the same time give them hope that eventually they will be able to get a job that they can call their own.

In other countries they have completely changed gears concerning the unemployed. They have completely changed gears concerning people on welfare. However, here in this country we continue to say that eventually market forces will put those people back to work. They will not because times have changed.

It is incumbent on us, as members of Parliament, to establish policy initiatives that will put these people back to work, that will train them and give them some sort of hope that eventually they will be back in the work force where they rightfully belong.

The Conservatives' economic policy, or the lack of such, is what we are talking about today. The myth they continue to perpetuate that their hands are tied and they cannot do anything because of the deficit we have is completely unacceptable. If we continue to use that kind of philosophy this country will get into bigger trouble than it already is.

Let me give an example as it relates to regional development. In northern Ontario there is a regional development program called FEDNOR. It has a particular mandate to diversify the economy. That is what its mandate is. It has to set the rules and regulations by which the business community can access certain loans and grants.

The other day I put forward a very legitimate concern of a very large constituency in my riding, the agricultural community. We have been working for the last 20 years in Kenora—Rainy River to have a port of entry into Minnesota. Minnesota is a very protectionist state. It does not allow the export of agricultural commodities through northern Ontario into Minnesota.