

*Adult Occupational Training Act*

—is one of the major federal programs directed toward the alleviation of poverty by helping the poor develop their skills and thus improve their income and employment prospects. Its impact is directly centred on the poor.

However, in typical Liberal fashion the minister fails to quote figures to support his flowing rhetoric, for this same report does not in any way demonstrate how the program is achieving such a laudable aim. Although the then minister pointed out that 60 per cent of all trainees and 94 per cent of female family-head trainees in 1970 were living at or below the poverty line when put on a course, there is no reference to the proportion removed from poverty as a result of the training they received from the course.

There are some serious hindrances in the Adult Occupational Training Act which cripple any anti-poverty initiative the manpower training program might otherwise have. First of all, the underlying principles of the manpower training programs are not oriented toward disadvantaged groups. The Canadian government's strategy in the field of manpower policy is primarily a growth strategy—this was stated by the Economic Council of Canada in its eighth annual review—with the objectives of equity and stabilization clearly being secondary. This strong emphasis on growth and efficiency provides a sharp contrast with the manpower strategy of other countries, notably the United States.

In the United States, training programs are much more heavily oriented to serving disadvantaged groups. Most programs which draw on federal funds in the United States require that all or a large majority of trainees come from the disadvantaged population, meaning that they are poor and have one or more serious handicaps in finding and keeping satisfactory jobs.

Another criticism concerning the principles underlying the operations of the manpower training program has been voiced by the Special Senate Committee on Poverty. Their report charges that the federal manpower program is oriented toward providing a service to employers and not toward meeting the needs of the individual worker. Such orientation conflicts to some extent with the purposes of the Adult Occupational Training Act, as stated on March 3, 1967, by the then minister of manpower and immigration who said, as recorded at page 13738 of *Hansard* of March 3, 1967:

We want to provide a second chance to the people who need it most. These are the men and women who missed the chance to acquire a skill during their youth or whose skill has been made obsolete by technological change.

The Special Senate Committee on Poverty charges that "what was intended as a 'people-oriented' program has become an 'economy-oriented' program". In addition to this problem arising from the principles of the manpower training program there is a second problem that hinders the effectiveness of the program in fighting poverty. This problem is that the regulations governing the application of the act provide that a potential applicant for a place in an occupational training program must have "a specific vocational goal".

This regulation is particularly discriminatory when applied to poor people in Canada. Persons without a basic education are not usually aware of the variety of occupational opportunities available to those with job skills. Why

[Mr. Muir.]

was this stipulation not removed from the Adult Occupational Training Act through Bill C-195, if the Minister of Manpower is truly interested in helping the disadvantaged, and I think he is?

There is a third way in which the Adult Occupational Training Act is at fault. The act provides that no occupational training course may exceed 52 weeks duration of full-time instruction. The result of this provision is that no person requiring more than one year's academic upgrading is eligible for occupational training under the act. Because almost all vocational skill programs in Canada today require a grade 10 education as a prerequisite—here I refer to trades such as welding, carpentry, the electrical trades and plumbing—and because most academic upgrading courses can raise a student's functioning equivalent grade level by about three grades in 52 weeks, very few persons with an educational attainment below grade 7 can gain entry into "basic training for skills development" occupational training courses. Some of these persons do gain entrance to manpower programs but usually this happens in error or because there is a sympathetic manpower counsellor. In fact, in the 1968-69 training courses only 13.2 per cent of all the trainees had had five years or less schooling when they entered the course.

This 52-week limitation on programs is all the more important when we consider the direct correlation between a low level of schooling and a high degree of unemployment. In May, 1971, persons with less than a grade 8 education had an unemployment rate of 7.4 per cent compared to only 5.1 per cent for persons with a post-secondary education.

• (1530)

In the Atlantic region, persons with less than a grade 8 education had a 10.4 per cent unemployment rate in May, 1971, while those with a post-secondary education had a rate of only 6.2 per cent. Consider Cape Breton Island, where the educational level of a portion of the population is comparatively low and the unemployment rate comparatively high; in fact, figures of 20 per cent to 25 per cent have been given by non-partisan groups.

Only within recent days have we received a report from an association called the Cape Breton Alliance for Development which is comprised of the clergy, labour, unions, boards of trade and people in other fields with no political affiliation. This group conducted a survey on the island as a result of a grant under the Local Initiatives Program and came up with the figure of 29.31 per cent unemployment on Cape Breton Island. This is a tragedy, Mr. Speaker. There are those within the government who may say that these people do not know what they are talking about, but I think they did their job very sincerely. They suggested measures for reducing unemployment.

I placed a motion before the House under Standing Order 43 in order to discuss this matter, but it was not accepted by the government. I was sorry that the government House leader, who also represents in this House a portion of Cape Breton, did not rise to assist me in getting his colleagues to allow the motion to come before the House so that the contents of the report could be sent to the committee for consideration.