

Government Orders

This Bill redirects some \$800 million from the benefit fund to training programs. But we need to look at who is being trained, who is doing the training, and for what are they being trained. The focus is not on the low-wage earner or the new entrant to the workforce. It is not on improving basic literacy skills. It is not even on improving the general level of skills in the workforce. The programs have simply prepared people for temporary unemployment, have trained them not for future needs but to fill short-term, low paying jobs.

Over the past few years moneys for training have been cut back. Our colleges and vocational institutes have been demoralized as more and more government funding is directed to private firms which offer not skill development or basic education but rather narrow the skills of workers to fit certain predetermined job criteria. Visible minorities, women, older workers and the handicapped have not seen their over-all position in the workplace improved as the stereotypical assumptions which continue to pervade the workplace deny them access to on-the-job training or see them funnelled into the so-called traditional job tracks.

Bill C-21 does nothing to address these inequities, and, in fact, will only make them worse as the present system is continued with more funds directed to private training facilities. This money will be taken directly from the income support component of the UI system. Workers will be punished, will remain underskilled and remain under the constant threat of imminent poverty.

This Bill does not recognize that those who could benefit most from a comprehensive skill development policy will be excluded from training programs. The increase in the numbers of weeks required to qualify for training programs will only perpetuate an underclass of unskilled and marginal workers.

The discrimination which this bill continues between major and minor attachment claimants ensures that for many there is no hope of breaking out of the vicious cycle of poverty that sees them moving from brief periods of low-paid employment to possibly some UI benefits to social assistance. This is the reality of Bill C-21. I would like to turn for a moment to the experience faced by workers in my own riding. Their experience is indicative of the problem which this government has failed to address in Bill C-21, the lack of a full employment strategy coupled with a regional industrial policy that has

taken a toll on those workers in my riding. Not too many months ago, Fibreglas Canada closed its insulation plant in Mission, laying off some 200 workers. The impact of this closure on a relatively small community like Mission, British Columbia, has been hit very hard. What is most disheartening is the fact that now we are beginning to hear of shortages in the availability of insulation from building contractors and building supply firms in my riding. Now they are looking to the U.S. to fill this void in the market.

• (1210)

My point is simply this. Would it not be more cost effective and efficient if the government directed its efforts to providing a comprehensive full employment strategy and a regional economic development plan rather than let the market forces dictate? I know I am not going to get an immediate answer, but the question has been begged on several occasions.

Would not the government's and workers' money be more wisely spent on assuring continued employment rather than on benefits and retraining of an already skilled workforce. Why punish those who through no fault of their own are now unemployed? Why threaten the stability of a viable community when real planning and a concern for economic growth would forgo such hardships?

A second industry in my riding is also suffering from government neglect and short-sightedness. The shake and shingle manufacturers in the Fraser Valley are facing massive loss of market for their product if a decision of the Los Angeles city council to ban the use of cedar shingles is not reversed through the courts. Thirty-five hundred jobs are at stake because this government has come too late to support this \$350 million industry.

Should these workers lose their jobs, they will need to call on the support of the UI system to feed their families and to pay their rent or their mortgages. The workforce is a skilled one. The workers produce a valuable, safe product, yet their jobs are threatened. This government would rather spend money to punish the unemployed and to train workers for jobs that have no future.

The most repugnant aspect of this bill is what it will do to the working poor of this country. I have already noted that their voices were not heard during the hearings. They do not have many advocates in this chamber to