

Supply

The minister's bill specifies that he will try to conclude with the provinces official agreements on the implementation of four manpower programs designed to put people back to work. However, should he be unable to come to an agreement with the provinces, he reserves the right to implement his programs with or without their consent. The federal government gives itself the right to bypass the provinces, in case no agreement can be worked out. Does the Minister of Human Resources Development agree with us that the provinces will negotiate with a knife at their throats?

The fifth program announced by the minister provides for the establishment of a job creation fund amounting to \$300 million over three years, which is not distributed among the provinces. To obtain federal funds, the provinces and perhaps even the municipalities will have to inject an equivalent amount. This type of funding favours the richest provinces. This goes against the objective of the fund, which is to create jobs in high unemployment regions.

On the one hand, the minister is promoting overlap between the various levels of government and supporting the costs, and on the other hand, he is tightening UI qualifying conditions and reducing UI benefits.

For the second year in a row and in spite of the UI account surplus, the Minister of Finance announced in his February budget speech that the funds allocated by the Treasury Board to the Canadian job strategy administered under the unemployment insurance program would be cut by an additional \$1.1 billion for fiscal years 1996 and 1997.

At the same time, the Minister of Human Resources Development is announcing that \$800 million will be allocated to training programs to promote job readiness. This new resource envelope being funded through the UI fund, the government is able to save \$300 million on the backs of employers and employees just by shifting the load.

By introducing in his reform the notion of weekly hours of work and by increasing the number of weeks of work required to qualify for benefits, the minister is going after part time workers, most of whom are women, and seasonal workers, the most vulnerable segment of our society. By acting this way, the minister is giving a one-way ticket for social assistance to a larger number of Quebecers, as more than 40 per cent of new welfare recipients were previously on UI.

Once all of minister Axworthy's proposals will have been implemented, they will represent a \$640 million shortfall for the people of Quebec. In my riding, the economy is heavily dependent on the expansion of the tourist, forestry, farm and business industries, all of which provide mostly part time and seasonal employment.

On the whole, UI reform represents a shortfall of approximately \$7 million just in my riding.

The federal government is drawing its inspiration from the cuts Alberta and Ontario made on the backs of workers and the disadvantaged. The Chrétien government could show some initiative and daring in cutting tax benefits for large companies and the best paid members of our society, but apparently he would rather disguise his deficit reduction effort as a social program reform.

According to a document released by the HRD department, the reform making the unemployment insurance into an employment insurance is designed, among other things, to help unemployed workers meet the challenges of new job requirements and career renewal.

• (1635)

Could the minister tell us how, concretely, his reform proposal will resolve the persistent disparity between the ever increasing number of unemployed and the 300,000 jobs that remain vacant every year in Canada, because the unemployed lack adequate training?

This reform will certainly perpetuate overlap between levels of government and the associated costs, but it will also force all those who are looking for a job or for further training to go back and forth between their Canada employment centre, the regional office of the Société québécoise de développement de la main-d'oeuvre, educational institutions and aid agencies. The people of Quebec and Canada will not only have to bear the brunt of this reform, but they will also have to put up with the drawbacks of overlap. That is the real impact of the Axworthy reform.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened to the comments of the hon. member. I must admit it seemed there was more discussion about governments and partisan issues than about people. I was concerned that the member had not really addressed the basic issues and the needs of the workers of Canada, regardless of what province they live in. We only have one taxpayer. The important issue is that we really make sure the services provided to Canadians are focused and efficient.

The member talked a little about the fact that in his opinion job training is the sole jurisdiction of Quebec. He said there was federal encroachment by this legislation that has come forward before the House and basically reduced it to a simple matter of petty politics. He then concluded that Quebecers needed full control over manpower training but then concluded we need a constructive partnership. In itself, that is a total contradiction. You cannot have full control and a constructive partnership at the same time.

My real question has to do with the whole UI issue. The member seems to talk about the UI distribution as some sort of instrument of equalization of benefits. Quite frankly, every region of Canada should have one objective, and that is to eliminate all benefits for all Canadians because we will not need them. We need people to get jobs. UI is not a matter of