

Government Orders

We currently spend \$12 billion on unemployment insurance benefits and only \$400 million on training our workers. Clearly, we must achieve a better balance between income support measures and measures designed to maintain or create jobs, and that is what we are trying to do with Bill C-21.

Mr. Speaker, the best legacy a country can give its young workers is the kind of professional training that will help them build a future for themselves instead of joining the ranks of welfare recipients and the chronically unemployed.

The labour force must be able to meet the challenge of technological change. We think it is also essential, however, that the private sector should do its share and invest more in occupational training. As part of the labour force development strategy, between now and 1994, the private sector will be asked to spend \$1 billion annually on training its work force.

Mr. Speaker, the action taken by our government reflects once again our commitment to establishing an effective partnership to ensure the prosperity of this country.

The purpose of Bill C-21 is to make our labour force more productive and more competitive, but there is more. The proposed legislation also aims to provide for greater equity among certain categories of workers, and especially among the various regions in this country. I am thinking more specifically of women and older workers. I am also referring to certain measures in connection with our obligation to consider regional disparity when calculating benefits.

Women account for more than half the population in this country, and it stands to reason we should bring the Unemployment Insurance Act more into line with the provisions of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms with respect to employment equity.

As the minister responsible for employment equity, I have always maintained that our competitive position as a nation depends largely on that vast potential that Canadian women represent on the labour market. It is time that as a society, we woke up to this reality and made it possible for women to pursue their career objectives while sharing family responsibilities.

In the past, Canadian women have shown they were able to reconcile the two, as long as we, as a society and as a government, were willing to provide them with the means to do so. Our government recognizes the

impressive contribution made by women on the labour market, and as part of its reform, it has introduced some very important social measures. I am surprised that throughout this debate, Mr. Speaker, so little has been said about the major social measures that were introduced to enable women to enter the labour market: maternity leave and parental leave up to a total of thirty weeks. All these measures reflect our government's recognition of the role played by women, couples and families.

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, it is also our duty to help older workers. These workers are a pool of experience and talent which is vital to our economy. It is imperative that older workers be encouraged to contribute. The Canadian workforce will be all the more qualified and productive. One hundred million dollars more will be invested in employment programs for older workers. As minister responsible for seniors, I say thanks for this reform.

Presently, workers aged 65 and over are not allowed to pay UI premiums and are not, therefore, entitled to receive benefits when they lose their employment. Our bill will correct this situation. It will allow for workers aged 65 and over to pay into the program and, naturally, benefit from its protection.

[*Translation*]

But we are also interested in the situation of our youth. We will spend \$100 million to develop young people's skills. These funds will be used to launch a new program to meet the needs of various growing industries and occupations and will provide training for another 50,000 young people.

Mr. Speaker, one of the basic principles of this reform is to ensure that Canadians who can work are able to do so and that everyone understands that it is better to have a job than to live on unemployment insurance or welfare. We must, I repeat, break the vicious circle: short-term jobs, unemployment insurance, welfare. The workers of this country want something else, and we as a government are working on it. We know that Canadians really want to work. We are betting that these workers will use the training opportunities that we make available to them.

It is just as important to be fair with the regions. As you know, Canada is not immune to regional disparities. There are wide gaps, especially in hiring. We must admit the obvious fact that it is harder to find a job in St John's,