

*National Training Act*

**Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert):** Mr. Speaker, we continue to debate this legislation at a time of economic crisis. We were led to expect that the Versailles summit marked some new beginnings for Canadian economic policy. We do not need another new beginning like the last one, which ended in the crash of the megaproject strategy.

Today we are considering an employment training measure at a time when Canada suffers from post-depression high unemployment. I see nothing in this bill which will address the problem of the 1.2 million people who are unemployed by the count of Statistics Canada or the real unemployed who push the figure to 1.9 million and are victims of the government's fiscal and monetary strangulation of the economy.

● (1550)

I have looked in vain, Mr. Speaker, for an optimistic note about Canada's economic performance in recent months. Instead, I have found this kind of unrelenting pessimism as voiced by the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) on May 10, when he said:

We are not in a position to offer an optimistic picture of the immediate future. The resumption of growth in the OECD area in the months ahead will be moderate at best, and total unemployment is likely to rise even further. While better inflation performance is under way in many countries, including Canada, it has been much slower than we would have liked.

He went on to utter the obligatory excuses about U.S. economic performance and U.S. interest rates, followed by criticism of Canadian workers for not taking part in "moderation of income demands". This, Mr. Speaker, can only be described as a threadbare excuse for threadbare policies. Surely the lack of confidence now being shown in the economy must suggest to the minister that there is a grievous lack of confidence in him.

In the same address on May 10 the minister said:

Measures are being taken to reduce the immediate hardships of high unemployment, as dictated by particular national circumstances—but we all realize the route to genuine recovery must lead through lower inflation.

I suppose the bill we have before us today is one of those measures, a government band-aid to minister to the army of unemployed. Those of us who looked at this exercise in skills matching would much rather be looking at a job-creation policy. The Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Axworthy) appears to have been far too occupied with a bail-out policy of work sharing to be bothered with addressing the national unemployment crisis which faces us now. There was a time, not long ago, when the Liberal leader of the day, Lester Pearson, talked optimistically of an unemployment rate of 2 per cent, the so-called natural rate of unemployment of people in transition between jobs.

Since that time we have been treated to a lot of buzz words or fuzz words, such as "participation rate, baby boom generation, structural unemployment" and all the rest. What it means purely and simply is a significant retreat from the goal of full employment.

The government acknowledged that in the 1980 departmental study led by David Dodge, which was made public by my

colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow). That study said that full employment was not really an official goal of the federal government, and unemployment had to be traded off against price stability. Even though at that time we had a higher profile parliamentary task force study before us, which would define full employment at 4 per cent unemployed, most of us know well enough that it is the department's brief which catches the ministerial ears. As for Lester Pearson and his 2 per cent, that seems a part of Liberal history which is gone and has been forgotten.

The goal of the post-war generation of full employment, remembering only too well the misery and failure of the great depression, finds no place in this government at all. Yet providing jobs for every Canadian willing and able to work is the only worthy goal for any national government. Any retreat from that goal deserves to be broadcast not only to the unemployed but to every thinking and caring Canadian who realizes that employment goes a long way toward defining the dignity and self-worth of every person in our society.

The parliamentary task force made some other worthwhile observations. They singled out the "make work" nature of many employment and immigration programs when long-term job creation should have been the goal. It found that only 20 per cent of employers did on-the-job training, and that skilled labour shortages would require a commitment by industry to do much more. Unfortunately, the national training program as outlined by the minister will largely address the concerns of the Dodge study and largely ignore the concerns put before us by the parliamentary task force. We will plunge into another brave new world of skills-matching via Bill C-115, but does this bill really do the limited amount expected from it? We should take a good look at it and find out.

Earlier in this House the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie) told us about the history of vocational training in Canada. He did it very well but he should have added that many of our problems today are the result of that vocational training act. I believe the mistakes in that act will be repeated. For example, for years government employment forecasts have depended on voluntary disclosure from employers. The results have not provided the accurate information needed to plan a training policy. That process has not been changed in this act.

Second, the Dodge report suggested that the western energy megaprojects should be the basis of new training requirements, yet these projects are in collapse. Should the federal government, therefore, unilaterally define the national training priority on the basis of a tenuous economic strategy? Past experience suggests that is a very doubtful process.

Third, we seem to be unduly occupied with industry's requirements. Where is the commitment to what people want to do? Why are so many community colleges, which most clearly aim their graduates toward available jobs, having to turn back thousands of applicants because of restraint policies? If we are not short of medical personnel and a lack of commitment to medicare which would employ them, why is the Canadian Medical Association talking about rationing medical services?