

told to develop skills because there will be jobs available, but these jobs simply do not exist.

Madam Speaker, if we reduce benefits and force the unemployed to go back to work, there should at least be jobs available, which is not the case. This is not the time for the Government of Canada to go after the unemployed. What is needed are well thought out policies to stimulate employment. And, in particular, we should take advantage of the current unemployment situation to retrain those who are in need of training.

I mentioned earlier that I worked in a vocational training centre. I used to receive a lot of calls from unemployed people, since massive layoffs took place in my region, including at Alcan, Abitibi-Price, Cascades, as well as in some stores and other businesses. People are not stupid; they realized that they might not get their former job back, so they wanted to develop new skills and be retrained. This is why they would get in touch with the centre where I worked.

I would meet with them to assess their retraining opportunities. But when it came to the crucial issue, that is, "how will I survive while I am retraining and while I am in school?", I would tell them: "Right now, you get your unemployment insurance benefits, but if you come to my training centre to take courses during the day, or even at night, and you join some groups that are already there to be trained, well, you will have to give up your benefits." People were saying: "That does not make any sense, I have to support myself and my family." So, they would postpone their training plans.

• (1235)

But this is absolutely criminal! It is criminal that, in vocational training centres like the one in Jonquière, there are spaces available in disciplines which are part of the new technologies, such as electro-mechanics, digital controls and refrigeration. In my training centre alone, hundreds of thousands of dollars have been invested in equipment and instruments. Often, these are not being used. And in the streets, in stores, there are thousands of people who want to be trained, but who are wandering around, trying to occupy their time.

I think it would have been important in the present situation to have a concerted and effective vocational training policy which would make room for people and allow them to be supported by the community during their training. After that, they could go on the labour market and become an asset for society. But this is not what has been done.

What did we do during that time in terms of training? We argued. I have witnessed that in my own training centre.

Often, we waited for information from the federal government to see if unemployed workers wanted to apply for various training programs. At a certain point, the federal government

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would inform us that, for the time being, it did not have the funds and that personnel might be available in three or four months. Yet, workers cry out for training while various levels of government cannot agree on a clear policy.

Members of the Bloc Québécois have denounced the present overlapping in occupational training. The federal government makes decisions, the provinces make decisions, the Department of Education decides to structure its programs the way it wants and, at the end of the day, we have a situation where people who want to be trained have no training while places remain empty in our training centres.

This is outrageous, and that is why I condemn this bill, because it sends the following message to the unemployed: You cost too much, we doubt you really want to get back into the labour market, and so we are going to shorten your benefit period, but things should turn out in the end. But they will not.

One really wonders about the logic behind this kind of budget proposal. It takes a short-term view of the problem. The government wants to save billions of dollars in unemployment insurance benefits for a couple of years, but the money will be spent on welfare benefits because—and one of my colleagues made the point this morning—there are some very scary figures, and by that I mean that we can calculate the cost of the unemployment insurance measures proposed by the government. There are new welfare recipients in Quebec and people who are not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. This is a frightening situation, because the government is introducing measures, knowing there will be a significant negative impact, and meanwhile, it does not hold out any hope for the unemployed.

Last Wednesday, I attended a seminar organized by people who are concerned about regional development. At this seminar, a number of young people had this to say: We want jobs, and we want real jobs. We do not want another Katimavik program. We do not want to be kept busy painting fences in the parks during the summer. We want to get into the labour market. We want to be part of the social, political and economic life of our country.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak in this debate, and of course I will vote against Bill C-17, because I think it is absolutely unfair to the unemployed.

• (1240)

[English]

**Mr. John Williams (St. Albert):** Madam Speaker, I rise to speak against Bill C-17 which has been introduced with a fair amount of rhetoric but very little substance.

I would like to quote from a news release dated Ottawa, March 16, 1994 which says that the twin "objectives of the bill are job creation and deficit reduction". I started to think about job creation.