

Alleged Failure of Employment Policies

a remark which had been made by the new minister of welfare in British Columbia—it is a remark which ought to be enshrined in the records of this House as it will be enshrined in the memories of the unemployed in British Columbia. The minister said on one occasion recently that he plans to categorize all adults on welfare “so that they can be treated as human resources and kept in storage.” Could anything better illustrate the typical old-fashioned approach to manpower training?

How many human beings do we keep in storage? One of the earlier speakers referred to some who are kept there in penitentiaries. Others are kept there on welfare rolls. When we keep human beings in storage we prevent them from developing, from growing, from living. I believe our manpower policies ought to be changed so that human beings are taken out of cold storage and allowed to become people with blood coursing through their veins and ideas coursing through their heads. This is impossible for far too many people under the present system.

There are three or four things in the Adult Occupational Training Act which need to be changed, as has been pointed in a number of the briefs submitted to the Senate committee. First of all, the provision that no training program can exceed 52 weeks in artificial and stultifying: it should be discarded. In effect, it cuts out everyone whose educational level is lower than grade eight, and most people whose level is lower than grade ten. I recall one hon. member raising the case of a busload of young Indian people who had been taken to a manpower training centre and who had to be sent back to their scattered homes because it was found that their basic schooling was insufficient for them to enroll. If the program were not limited to a period of 52 weeks I am sure we could begin to deal with the problems of those whose earlier training had failed to fit them for enrolment in manpower courses. As it stands, this provision discriminates against poor people, against people who have had little or no schooling. It discriminates against minorities.

The second thing to be changed in the manpower legislation is the section which lays down that a student must have definite vocational goals before he can enroll. University students coming from comfortable, middle-class homes often do not have the faintest idea of what they are preparing for in life even after two years of study. If young people from homes which provide them with all kinds of opportunities cannot decide ahead of time on a fixed goal, how can we expect

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

people from underprivileged homes to have a firm goal before they enter these training centres? I cannot understand how this provision got into the manpower legislation.

• (3:50 p.m.)

I want to see it made possible under the manpower act for women to be considered as human beings in the full sense of the word. I want to see a provision in the act to provide that when a woman has been engaged in the domestic services of her home for three years, she shall be considered a person who has been in the labour force and is eligible for full manpower training and the vocational allowances that go with it. I am sick and tired of hearing people take it for granted that only the woman who goes out to sell ships, shoes and sealing-wax is working. The woman within the four walls of the family home looking after her husband, her children, and sometimes aged parents is working within the full meaning of the word and should be brought under the provisions of the act. This has been the objective of my bill, to bring women within the full meaning of this act.

I want to give one or two instances of just what this unamended act means in everyday life. Of many dozens of letters I have received I have picked out one that came to me a few days ago from Ottawa. You can see, Mr. Speaker, that my constituency is very much broader than Vancouver-Kingsway. This woman writes:

I am a married woman with two young children, recently separated and with a necessity to return to work. After a 7-year absence and returning to the work force as a secretary, I find that I am categorized as a beginner (I am 38 years old). The maximum salary I could earn, even at the top of the scale, would not be enough to support myself and my family. I do not have the experience or the training to compete for a higher category position. I do, however, have the desire to learn and, I believe, the capacity, for something more challenging and less dead-end than secretarial work. However, on applying to Manpower for retraining, I was told that I must be back in the labour force for at least three years before I could be eligible (what a waste of time) and, secondly, that there are no programs offering better scope than secretarial training.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I apologize to the hon. member, but I have to interrupt her because her time has expired. She may continue with the unanimous consent of the House.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mrs. MacInnis: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Since I would have been the only one today