

Some people might say that that is a little difficult in these days when budgets are tight and people no longer believe that government can act in the collective manner. That mood is pervasive across the nation, but we must dispel it. We must dispel the notion that the *status quo* is adequate and that we cannot take action.

I would like to identify one small step which governments could take today in order to demonstrate that action can be taken. I suggest that we study what social democratic governments have done in European countries such as Sweden where they have chosen to intervene in a significant way in the labour market by way of training and providing support for people as they move from one job to another. They have invested in people in order to bring down the level of unemployment.

Although models cannot be transferred from one country to another entirely without change, we know that in Canada one-fifth of our population is functionally illiterate. We must recognize that it will be impossible for us to solve the unemployment problem without doing something about that situation. We should take illiteracy as a challenge and put in place the programs and funding necessary to eliminate functional illiteracy. If we raise the skill levels of our people they could take advantage of employment opportunities and provide for the needs of their children. This is one area in which we could take a significant step forward.

This is not an abstract notion. While knocking on doors in my riding over the last few days I met a young mother at home with her child. This lady is seeking up-grading as a first step toward acquiring the necessary marketable skills.

In this way we could take a first step toward attacking the problem of unemployment, particularly where it is gravest such as in Newfoundland, on Indian reserves, and in the inner cities.

While there are many other issues to be addressed, such as the industrial strategy of the country and challenging the Government to back away from weakening Canadian sovereignty, we must recognize that the legislation before the House today which provides for a one-year extension of the variable entrance requirement is only a sop to the unemployed, the poor and the hungry. It is a commitment to the *status quo*. It is a reaffirmation of benign neglect. That is no longer adequate.

The time has come to challenge the neo-conservative dominance of the political debate in this country and to recommit ourselves to the value of providing for the basic human needs of all our citizens. We can start by taking the problem of unemployment seriously. We can start by committing the Government to do whatever it takes to reduce the unemployment rate in inner cities, which is now at about 30 per cent, to reduce unemployment in Newfoundland, which is at about 50 per cent, and to reduce unemployment on Indian reserves, which is at about 80 or 90 per cent. We must bring those rates down to at least the national level.

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

Let us stop this abuse of human beings. We must recognize in our actions and public policy that we are all equal. Let us stop this neglect. Let us get a government in place which is committed to action, can renew the hope of Canadians, and can give pride to all Canadians in the knowledge that we are a community rather than a dog-eat-dog society.

Mr. Harris: Mr. Speaker, my colleague referred to the unemployment rate in Sweden and Norway which is 2 per cent. I recently read a study of the unemployment rates of the 15 countries of the OECD and compared them with the rates in countries such as Canada, the U.S., Austria and Japan. The study compared all the factors which might be involved in an unemployment rate and tried to discover what would account for the differences.

After discounting factors which relate to the nature of the labour force, and certain other factors, the study concluded that the reasons for the varied unemployment rates was government policy. Certain governments pursue a policy of full employment and as a result their populations are employed. These countries perform as well or better as the other countries in the OECD but have full employment. It seems that whether we have full employment or not is a matter of government policy. Why does my colleague believe the Government does not pursue such a policy?

• (1250)

Mr. Keeper: Mr. Speaker, it is important for us to be reminded that full employment is not just an objective or dream, but a policy of some countries in the world. In other words, those countries use the full range of policy instruments available to them to pursue the objective of full employment and therefore bring about that result.

This reminds us that the kind of society in which we live is the result of the decisions we make. It is not like the weather, about which we cannot make decisions. However, these days it seems the climate can be a matter of human decision, as in the case of Brazil where the pollution in the rain forests of Brazil is adversely affecting the climate.

The Government does not pursue a policy of full employment because it believes that the private market is sacred and there should be no intervention. It believes that competition is the only ideology worth upholding. It forgets that the Government should intervene when markets do not work for the people and competition abuses the quality of human life in society. We must take collective action and reinforce the values of solidarity.

The fact is that we are our brother's keeper and when many in our society are suffering because of a lack of adequate employment we must address that problem and take action. It is time to get rid of a Government that is simply satisfied with the *status quo* and is unwilling to strive for the goal that every citizen's right to a decent job can be fulfilled.