

Government Orders

Included in the briefs by the municipalities were also references to the provinces. The committee heard no witnesses from provincial politics, but we were able to get references to provinces from the cities. I hope that answers the member's question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: There is very little time left. The member for Mission—Coquitlam on a question or comment.

Ms. Langan: Mr. Speaker, many of us are wearing red carnations today. Could you explain where those carnations came from and the symbolism of them?

• (1610)

Mr. Fisher: The construction industry will be among the most devastated industries in the country. We do not often view people who are so highly trained. The government is talking about training. I do not know what it is they are going to train the construction industry for; perhaps meat-cutting or waitressing or bilingual secretaries. I do not know.

These are already highly trained people. All they want is jobs. That is precisely what this is about. The construction industry is going to be highly devastated because of these changes. These men and women were today giving bouquets of flowers as a demonstration of goodwill to the minister and asking her, in the kindest of terms, if she would reconsider what she is doing.

An Hon. Member: She would not even see them.

Mr. Fisher: Yes, it is true. The minister would not see them.

Some Hon. Members: Shame!

[*Translation*]

Hon. Monique Vézina (Minister of State (Employment and Immigration) and Minister of State (Seniors)): Mr. Speaker, I must say I am very pleased to take part in this debate, especially after hearing what was said by previous speakers, for the opposition, and I will take this opportunity to set the record straight.

This bill is of vital importance to our labour force and to Canada as a whole. This measure once again reflects our government's determination to help workers adjust to technological change and, above all, to deal with a market that will be increasingly competitive during the next ten years.

Mr. Speaker, we could have left things as they were and said "no" to a thorough overhaul of our unemployment insurance system. We could have made a few minor changes and let the vagaries of the economy do the rest. Finally, we could have suggested band-aid solutions instead of providing a permanent remedy to the pervasive ills of underemployment and workers' lack of training.

Our government has realized that in this area as in so many others, one must have the courage to do what the situation demands.

We decided to change a system that no longer meets the current needs of the labour force and adapt it to tomorrow's needs, especially with respect to occupational training for Canadian workers.

[*English*]

Our government is very conscious that the time has come to substantially adjust the unemployment insurance program. The time has come to provide the training our workforce needs to meet the challenges of our technological era. As a government it is our duty and we will not fail. Faced with a labour market that has become more complex, we realize that there are fewer places for workers with minimal instruction and no professional training. Market pressures are forcing business to turn ever more to robotics telecommunication and high tech. Even traditional sectors must now use machinery that is much more complex.

[*Translation*]

Over one million people are having trouble finding jobs, and companies are having a hard time finding qualified workers.

Because of the lack of training programs, not all workers are able to take advantage of this new technology.

As far as the training and productivity of our labour force is concerned, our country lags behind other industrialized nations. Considering the Free Trade Agreement, Europe 1992 and increasingly competitive international markets, we must act quickly and decisively if we want to maintain our competitive position.

Mr. Speaker, our economic future is at stake, and it will depend on what we do today.