

The minister has correctly identified chronic shortages in many highly skilled industrial occupations and has put his plan forward as his government's single most important attempt to alleviate them. Do keep in mind that the whole positive effect of his plan is dependent on the revitalization of the economy through a dramatic drop in interest rates, inflation and so on. It will not, in itself, contribute to reactivated industrial activity, but will only come into play after the economy has enjoyed a major period of recovery. It would be useful, however, for parliamentarians for once to learn from the past and not be tempted to approve programs which have the gloss of currency but which will be redundant within a few years.

In Canada, procurement of skilled labour has come primarily through immigration, training within industry such as apprenticeship programs, government manpower training programs involving the private sector, or graduates of community colleges and post-secondary institutions. Before 1960 especially, the declining agricultural sector along with heavy immigration patterns provided adequate labour for a resource-based pattern of economic growth, as Canada had then. As a result, there was little pressure for our educational institutions to provide vocational training and we paid the price for this when, in the late fifties and early sixties, highly-skilled workers were in short supply.

In the mid-sixties, despite government immigration policies to the contrary, there was a measurable decline in the proportion of skilled workers coming into the country, and Canada's potential economic-industrial growth and development was again arrested. Certain things were realized in the sixties, however, and a major expansion of university and college enrolment occurred, student populations rising two and a half times between 1961 and 1971. A similar though slightly lesser expansion occurred in non-university enrolment during the same period.

Since the great numbers of allegedly unemployable university graduates started to flood the labour market in the early seventies, both provincial and federal governments have launched a number of institutionally-based programs designed to bridge the gaps between basic secondary school training, post-secondary training, and productive roles in the job market, productive for individuals and productive for the country.

Indeed, the precursor of this bill, the Adult Occupational Training Act, was an example of this, and it worked reasonably well within the limits of its design. However, as experts in the industrial-employment sector have pointed out, instead of providing truly relevant and useful educational alternatives to institutionalized forms of training at the college and university level, these programs merely constituted "short-term manpower policy instruments to alleviate temporary skill imbalances", provided retraining opportunities for marginal workers, and offered alternatives to the UIC rolls. These hardly addressed the major long-term staffing needs of Canadian industry and indeed, as we see now, these programs just could not hold up in the face of a rapidly-changing industrial world. This is not to say that colleges alone can provide the full range of skilled

workers that we need today if we are to have any hope of benefiting from the recovery if and when it comes. Colleges can take up a good deal of the slack in areas such as service occupations and production crafts such as tool and dye making. The major input of federal funds must be put where it will do the most good but at the same time without causing detrimental effects to our post-secondary education sector which is absolutely crucial to the national good.

• (1750)

In the sixties and seventies, only 5 to 15 per cent of government manpower programs were conducted in concert with the private sector. Between 1966 and 1970, industrial firms reporting some form of in-house training actually declined from 26 per cent to 23 per cent. In the manufacturing sector, only one firm in five provided some source of training. In all of this, only 16 per cent of those being trained by industry itself were female. I must say that I am glad some sort of assertive action element is to be included in this act, not only on behalf of Canadian women but also on behalf of our native populations and disabled workers.

It is clear that skilled-labour training needs are not being fulfilled either by institutionalized training or by traditional immigrant sources of skilled workers. Canadian wages are now too low. It is clear too that the lack of commitment to industry-based training schemes has resulted in skilled worker shortages in a number of occupations.

The principal point of attack to alleviate this situation is at the industry level and guided by a philosophy of co-operative training between the private sector and our educational institutions. This does not mean that the government should reallocate resources from universities to other institutions or to private sector training schemes in light of labour changing conditions. We have seen that such a policy is shortsighted in the extreme. What it means is that the errors and imbalances of the past should be neither repeated nor sustained, and that the federal strategy should promote a stable multi-level education level where short-term labour demands can be absorbed without the huge lurches which have characterized federal government policy in recent years as it responds to current, high profile, but not necessarily crucial pressures.

As the OECD recently observed about Canada's training policies, the general tone of policy-making is adaptation to short-term pressures, doing a little more of what already has been done and, above all, response to pressures or economies and reductions of expenditures.

The point is that nothing should be done to endanger the integrity of our institutions of higher learning for the sake of what may be very short-term labour market pressures. At the same time, the private sector should be encouraged and made aware of the very great potential benefits to be had from an internally-trained, highly-skilled and fully adaptable labour force. The bill before us does neither of these things, either philosophically or pragmatically.