

Supply

Liberal government seems to have found to deal with a very serious problem in this country with 1,600,000 unemployed people.

I think this is easy to demonstrate. The government says it will create 45,000 temporary jobs, and we must remind you that when they talk about jobs, they talk about maintaining jobs; 45,000 jobs created and maintained for 1,600,000 unemployed workers. I do not see how the hon. member for Peterborough can think this will solve in any way the situation in his riding. Assuming that unemployment should be around 10 per cent—it is now around 13 or 14 per cent in my riding of Trois-Rivières—it is no reason to rest easy and tell ourselves that the government is up to the task.

Especially since—and I see the Minister of Human Resources is here—this same government is going after the unemployed rather than unemployment, the poor instead of poverty itself. We hear the government tell the poorest among us, those who are already in a bad spot, because unemployed workers are in a bad spot, that from now on they will get 55 per cent instead of 57 per cent of what they were earning and work longer to receive less, for a shorter period. I think they are going after those who are poorest.

• (1320)

They say we must modernize and revamp—the words they use are exceptionally subtle in denoting intellectual honesty—our social programs. We do not know how but we do know one thing as I speak: the government was able to figure out how much it will cost in two or three years, so it can spare the public purse by going after the unemployed and the poor: \$7.5 billion, including \$5.5 billion in unemployment insurance. We know that already. That is what I rise against when I hear such comments.

First of all, we have no real solution for reducing unemployment since the so-called infrastructure program is not a solution, it is not even a half-measure. At the same time, the government is going after those who are already hard pressed while leaving the richest Canadians alone. They create committees to examine whether their measures are justified or not. The time has come to review our thinking because the underlying process, as everyone is increasingly aware, is the disappearance of the middle class, like in an underdeveloped country with few rich people and a lot of poor people. This is what we think.

[English]

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Human Resources Development and Minister of Western Economic Diversification): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak at this time, particularly in light of the comments just made by the hon. member.

[Translation]

First of all, the motion before this House is incorrect and so are the comments made by the hon. member from the opposition. I will take this opportunity to set the record straight.

For one thing, this year, there will be more jobs for Canadians, and particularly for Quebecers. The Conference Board said there could be as many as 57 per cent more jobs for Quebecers this year, as compared to last year.

Unfortunately, the opposition fails to mention the positive initiatives, measures and efforts the government and the private sector have made to create employment across Canada.

[English]

In saying that, I do not think we are here just to argue about figures. I think we are here to argue or talk about a very deep felt need by Canadians to have the opportunity to share in work, to have a sense of dignity, of making a contribution to their own and their family's well-being. The prospect, the hope for a job, for themselves and for their children is one of the great ambitions that we have always held out to Canadians.

What is not recognized in anything I have heard or listened to by opposition members so far is any recognition whatsoever that the world of work has changed and that we cannot simply fall back on old methods, that we cannot simply defend the status quo, that we cannot simply argue on a rhetorical basis for what used to be.

[Translation]

I found particularly interesting, for example, this comment from the editorialist for *La Presse*, Mr. Alain Dubuc: "Program reform is simply a must for everyone's sake. Lucien Bouchard is making himself the advocate for status quo". And I would like to draw point out this line: "Out of demagoguery or sheer narrow-mindedness, the Bloc Quebecois nationalists are turning into advocates for inflexibility and inertia". How true! It is true that the members across the way are advocating inflexibility and inertia and using demagogical arguments.

• (1325)

[English]

This is not a time for that kind of narrowness of spirit, that unwillingness to change, that attempt to exploit people's deep concerns for immediate partisan advantage.

We have to talk about how to put a good employment strategy in place in this country, something that takes into account various elements. There is no single answer. There is no panacea for the creation of employment. It is something that is affecting every country and it is going to take a full, concerted, comprehensive approach.