

The Budget—Mr. Atkey

we have a shortage of workers with specific skills. This government intends to act to meet this challenge.

There is another challenge too, that of securing justice for those groups within the economy that have traditionally faced special problems in the job market—youth, women, native peoples, the handicapped and others. We intend to do something about that too.

[*Translation*]

Besides, it is clear that the demographic changes in our country and the necessity for our economy to adapt to the energy crisis and to the new physiognomy of international trade will provoke upheavals in the labour force and the labour market in coming years. Therefore, the government must adopt a flexible and balanced approach to take up these challenges.

[*English*]

The immediate problem of young Canadians seeking to establish themselves in a tight labour market has been at the forefront of our considerations in determining the nature and scale of our employment programs for 1980-81. Our concern stems from two main sources. First, youth suffer much more than their fair share of existing unemployment. For example, in November of this year, while youth made up about a quarter of the labour force, they also accounted for almost half of the total unemployment figure. In fact, of the number of Canadians who were looking for work, 15.4 per cent of those aged 15 to 19 and 10.7 per cent of those aged 20 to 24 were unemployed, compared with 5.3 per cent aged 25 and older. I am inclined to the view that these figures probably underestimate the problem because young people are perhaps more easily discouraged from looking for work when they sense it is difficult to find.

● (1700)

The second concern of the government stems from recognition of the importance that finding and keeping meaningful jobs has for the self-esteem and future labour market experience of young people.

[*Translation*]

It is well known that the first experiences of a worker have a determining influence on the rest of his active life and on his income level. The young people of the post-war baby boom now represent over a quarter of the labour force and during the years to come they will rapidly join the ranks of adult workers. For example, it is anticipated that in 1985 they will represent only 23 per cent of the labour force compared to over 26 per cent in 1980. Under these circumstances, it is particularly important that they now get the training and qualifications they will need to lead an active, significant and productive life as adults. Because above all, the government does not want to breed another generation of unemployment insurance and social welfare recipients. Our young people can do better than that, especially in a country as rich as ours in human and natural resources.

[Mr. Atkey.]

[*English*]

Mr. Speaker, although solid work experience in real jobs is important to all youth, the truly vital factor, especially for young people who have not had the advantage of higher education or formal skill training, is simply to land that first job. This can be critical to his or her ultimate success because it provides that all-important starting point. In that connection, I firmly believe that an authentic job, a real job, in the private sector will be more credible to potential employers than a job on a government make-work project.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Atkey: It is about those make-work projects that employers tend to be skeptical, if not downright negative.

We are also aware of the concern of parents for their children who are unable to find work or who drift between dead-end jobs and government support programs without learning to stand on their own feet. In fact, many parents feel that they have done everything possible in terms of educating their children and they ask themselves where they have failed or where they have gone wrong. Of course, the answer in most cases is that no blame can be attached to the parents. The problem has been the failure in the past to provide adequate incentives for the private sector to provide sufficient jobs. In the past, there have been a number of measures designed to alleviate youth unemployment. However, these measures, which existed in several federal departments, lacked a clear policy direction. The public was often confused by what appeared to be a hodge-podge of programs.

As announced in the Speech from the Throne, we will be establishing a youth employment secretariat to provide the direction that has been lacking in the past under the previous government. This secretariat will monitor existing programs and co-ordinate them to ensure that duplication is reduced and that they are meeting the real needs of Canadian youth. As an additional means to make sure that youth employment programs provide the best value for money invested in them, the youth employment secretariat will work to harmonize federal youth employment programs with those of the provinces. I might say there are many good programs in the provinces. One of the first tasks of this new secretariat will be to ensure co-ordination of temporary employment programs for the spring and summer of 1980 to accommodate the thousands of young students expected to come onto the labour market at that time.

Our commitment to youth, however, does not exclude other groups who face particular difficulties in the labour market and who do have a valid call on our energies and available resources.

The participation of women in the labour force is a matter which came up in the question period today, and I thank the hon. member opposite for raising it. This has been a problem which has been rising rapidly and continuously since the post-war period. Unfortunately, the trend of having enough jobs for women who want to get into the labour market as a permanent proposition is going to continue for some time.