

Supply

Right now, immediately, there are 480,000 people out of work. That cannot be ignored. We cannot say: "We are going to wait for the U.S. economy or the world economy to turn around and these people will eventually get a job. They may lose two, three or four years of their lives because of it, but we all have to take the pain and we all have to take the hardship". That does not wash. There are certain things this government can do today to invest in our young people, to invest in Canadians and to give them something to bridge the hard economic times they are facing today.

To answer my hon. colleague's question, both of them have done a minimal amount to help our young people but both of them sorely lack and have failed to address the main problem of 480,000 young Canadians who are out of work.

Mr. Jim Jordan (Leeds—Grenville): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak to the opposition motion today. I will try to put it in the context, as everybody else has done, of the utter disgrace we witnessed last week with the Minister of Finance and something he called an economic statement.

Personally, I was rather looking forward to it. I thought it would be some kind of blueprint and that Canadians could look forward to hearing something positive in it to address the problems they confronted at this time. Once again we saw the government failing Canadians, failing to focus Canada toward something that was positive and something that was renewable, something we could look forward to in the way of sound economic principles. It was totally lacking in what the Minister of Finance had to say.

Instead of taking measures which would instil confidence in Canadians, the government did nothing more than increase the levels of fear and the levels of apprehension in the minds of Canadians. The country is begging for leadership and integrity in leadership. It is not and has not been getting them from those opposite.

We spend a lot of time in the House talking about our internal problems, our social problems, violence in society, homeless people, the needs of the poor, food banks and the ever increasing number of people with a growing dependence on food banks. This is Canada, one of the richest countries in the world. Something is not

meshing here. There is a great correlation between those problems we dwell on so often and in such great depth.

• (1610)

Employment opportunities, there seems to be a correlation there. If you increase the one, you will decrease the other. I do not think anyone would argue with that. If that is true, and I think most people would agree that it is, why was unemployment not addressed in the mini budget, the economic statement or whatever it was? It was not addressed in a serious way.

The best context in which you could put this is, I am told, that it costs Canadian taxpayers about \$15,000 to keep a full time equivalent person on unemployment for a year. There is \$15,000. If the person was working and making the average Canadian wage, he would not need the \$15,000 naturally. In turn, he would be putting back into the economy in the way of taxes paid \$7,000 or \$8,000, depending on the wage scale.

With employment opportunities, Canadians would rediscover themselves. It would put some stability into those families once again, put some stability into our communities once again, make taxpayers out of the unemployed. It would have made sense if our finance minister had seen that correlation between employment or unemployment and the ability to pay taxes.

We are in tough times in Canada right now. I think Canadians were in the mood for a tough time strategy at this time in our history and we did not get it last Wednesday. The government tinkered and fiddled around a little bit with UI benefits when what we needed actually was an attack on the conditions that cause unemployment.

We did not need an attack on those who find themselves unemployed. They have been attacked for long enough. In this country, we need a revamped infrastructure. I am not suggesting that we should put people to work and call it work if it is just busy work. I do not think anyone would want to address the problem that way.

However, if you drive on the major highways in Canada today, you see that they are becoming dilapidated and worn out. Most of them were designed to carry a load for about 20 or 25 years. With little left of them, we are going to be confronted very soon in this country with a major bill for restructuring the major highways of this country.