

Adult Occupational Training Act

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, I will be in touch with the House leaders on the other side of the House later.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

ADULT OCCUPATIONAL TRAINING ACT

AMENDMENT RESPECTING ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS TO RECEIVE ALLOWANCES, AUTHORIZATION OF CONTRACTS WITH EMPLOYERS

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Manpower and Immigration) moved that Bill C-195, to amend the Adult Occupational Training Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration.

He said: Mr. Speaker, may I say at the outset that Bill C-195 by no stretch of the imagination can be represented as a major overhaul of the legislation adopted in 1967 upon which the Department of Manpower is founded. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, it has become obvious from discussions with the provinces and other interested groups involved with the labour movement, with employers' groups, and so on, that certain sections of the original act are badly in need of amending. Therefore, the perennial problem that faced me as minister, when I assumed responsibility for this portfolio, was deciding whether I should completely revamp the existing legislation or, possibly with the co-operation of the House, bring in one or two amendments affecting certain sections of the act and therefore make the act much more meaningful.

Although I will limit my remarks as much as possible to the bill before us and not talk about the general subject matter of manpower, something I intend to do next week when the opportunity presents itself in the budget debate, may I at this time pay tribute to the former deputy minister, Mr. Couillard who has left the department he has been with since 1967, and who was responsible for building up and making effective the Department of Manpower.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, it is not too often that public servants are recognized for their contribution to Canadian society. Mr. Couillard was a better than average assistant deputy minister. The new deputy minister is a former commissioner-in-chief of the Unemployment Insurance Commission, thus establishing a link and co-ordination in anticipation of a tighter and closer relationship between the Unemployment Insurance Commission and the Department of Manpower in future years.

• (1220)

What Bill C-195 is intended to do, Mr. Speaker, is remove what has become known in Manpower circles as the three year rule. As members who were present in 1967 and participated in the debate of the day know, the three year rule had a very logical purpose. It was, of course, designed to direct priority attention in programs at the

[Mr. MacLean.]

disposal of the Department of Manpower to the older worker and for other logical reasons as well as age. Because of the fact that an older man or woman was limited to one skill that had become redundant, it was felt by incorporating the three year rule that priority in training would be given to a mature worker who may not have had an opportunity to receive an adequate education or proper training as a young man. It has, of course, achieved that objective.

The statistics which will be available at the committee stage will indicate that the priority of programs administered by the Department of Manpower, in co-operation with the provinces or by the provinces in co-operation with the Department of Manpower, whichever way you want to put it, have worked in this direction. A review of the unemployed, of which we are all very conscious, has indicated certain basic characteristics emerging. All too frequently, the unemployed in particular parts of this country are people without training and below average education. Unfortunately, younger people who have dropped out of school and have never had an opportunity of fulfilling that particular criteria have very great difficulty in proving that they have amassed the required three year attachment to the work force.

It is proposed in this amendment to the Adult Occupational Training Act that the three year rule be eliminated. We do not want to exclude, as the act now unintentionally does, younger workers and women who may wish to return to the work force, but who need upgrading, training and assistance, not only through courses, but in the form of financial aid while taking these courses. I know certain members opposite have a particular interest in this subject.

I want to bring to the attention of the House that in recent months, since I have become Minister of Manpower, although I have been limited in my activities, the provinces have been consulted to perhaps a greater degree than ever before. I happen to have a concept of what the Department of Manpower should be doing. I would like to get into this next week, as I mentioned. The provinces have been unanimous in their request that this particular feature of the existing act be dropped because of the unintentional discrimination it causes against the younger worker and women coming into the work force.

I hope for speedy passage of this bill, not only because of the discrimination it is causing at the moment and the frustration which it is causing many young people, but frankly because of the strong representations that have been made to the department by my provincial counterparts across Canada. There will and must be certain criteria as to age. We have suggested in the bill that, after the elimination of the three year concept, to become eligible the trainee must be at least one year older than the school leaving age within the province. That is for very obvious reasons. It is not only for maturity, but we do not want to unintentionally encourage young people from completing the basic education that is available in their particular province. As those who have read the bill know, it is proposed that the trainee must be one year older than the school leaving age in his or her province. He must also have been out of the regular school system for one year