

*Government Orders*

future in the years to come than they could hope for in recent years.

[English]

As the then Leader of the Opposition and now the Prime Minister said on the steps of Parliament Hill the day the election campaign started: We must give Canadians their smile again. We must give them that hope. We must make them feel better.

[Translation]

I am very much in favour of this initiative because, after all, the goal is to improve social programs. For example, the proposals put forward by our colleague the Minister of Human Resources Development are aimed at improving the social security system, so that it can better meet the expectations and needs of Canadians.

• (1650)

A good number of these programs have been in place for several years and the Canadian economy has changed since they were first introduced. I remember the days when an unemployment rate of three per cent was considered equivalent to full employment. Today's figures are totally different. I also remember the days when it was perfectly normal to have one salary per household, the bread winner usually being the man in the house. It goes without saying that these standards no longer apply. The situation has evolved and we must not only adapt accordingly, we must also change our social programs.

[English]

I am of the view that the best social program is a job. There is nothing quite like it, as they say in the commercial. If the best social program is a job, as I submit it is, then surely all of the other programs that we have must be such that one is always better with a job than without one.

That is not the case with social programs today. How many times have colleagues in this House heard constituents tell them that they cannot afford to work, that the social program that they are on is designed in such a way that they are taking a cut by going back to work?

For a single mother with three or four children going back to work is not easy. As a matter of fact, in many cases it is, without saying impossible, very hard. I am of the view that it is high time we started thinking of such concepts as guaranteed minimum annual income in such a way that no one is punished for trying to make life better for themselves. No one is punished for finding a job. That is not the case right now. That is not the case at all.

The other part to this is the unemployment insurance programs that we have. A few years ago we got into training

programs in a rather major way under many aspects of what is commonly referred to as UI. Some of these programs are for training but they are confusing at best.

[Translation]

Those of us who have referred constituents to training programs under section 26 of the Unemployment Insurance Act know that these people can, if they get benefits the day that the training begins, receive those benefits for a period which could be extended to 156 weeks. However, if these people make a claim under a program not covered by section 26 and go back to school while receiving UI benefits, they not only lose the possibility of having their benefit period extended, they also lose those benefits.

You will agree that if the objective is to provide training, programs should be structured so that people are not penalized precisely because they take a training course, as they should.

[English]

On the other hand we have section 14. People qualify under section 14 to take a training program sometimes identical to those under section 26. If they are taking a program and if they are offered a job they must resign forthwith from the training that they are taking to go to the job.

However, if they were approved under the other section they do not have to do it. That does not make a lot of sense to me. It seems that whatever little block was ticked off beside one's name determines how the training one will be receiving will be administered and whether one will receive benefits, extend benefits or have the benefits cut off altogether. That does not seem like a reasonable proposition to me.

• (1655)

If you are on unemployment insurance and you apply to work on some of these make work projects, under section 25 of the Unemployment Insurance Act, you go back to work and you receive a form of top-up in addition to your benefits, providing you have enough benefits to cover the whole period of the project you are going to work on.

In other words, if you have nine weeks of coverage left and you are starting to work on a project that will last ten weeks, you cannot work nine weeks and then quit. You have to refuse to take it altogether because you must have the requisite number of weeks for the duration of the program.

Maybe this makes sense to somebody but it does not at all to me. I am having some difficulty explaining all of this to those who asked me to represent them in this Chamber.