

Government Orders

achieve what is best, but we all have the interests of the Canadian people at heart.

We heard from many groups coast to coast. A personal disappointment I had was that we had very few representations from individuals. The reason I found this disappointing was that we had statistics and projections based on those statistics.

• (1600)

We had those projections done nationally, provincially, and regionally. But for the person who, through no fault of their own is unemployed, statistics are meaningless, for the individual unemployment means 100 per cent and the projections do not mean a thing.

The basis of all productivity in Canada is the individual Canadian. Our people are the most valuable resources that we have available to us. The changes represented in this bill are, in my opinion, part of a nation-wide drive that is going to achieve a vital economic objective, better and wiser use of our human resources.

The drive for this improvement officially got under way last April with the announcement of outlines of the new Canadian labour force development strategy, a package of specific measures designed to make this country more competitive by improving our use of human skills and energy.

For some reason, Canadian business has not developed a climate of training that exists in many other industrialized countries. The Canadian labour market has simply not been putting enough effort into its own human resource development. In that sense, this strategy amounts to a war against waste, and to help win that war we are mobilizing, through Bill C-21, the potential of our unemployment insurance program to be a positive tool for training and for skill development.

Waste is happening at just about every stage in our labour market, starting with the job entry level itself. An unacceptable percentage of young Canadians lack the basic skills they need to fulfil their first jobs. The average high school dropout rate across this nation is 30 per cent, an unacceptable level. All this is on the eve of the 1990s,

a decade in which every forecast tells us that most new jobs will require a minimum of 12 years of education.

Education and training issues are of course very complex. They are involving provincial jurisdictions and regional labour market needs and fast-changing skills. Ten years ago, who would have thought how important computer skills would be in a modern office.

The federal government is not solely responsible for developing a highly skilled and educated workforce. What we can do is to act as a facilitator. Through the labour force development strategy we have established a co-operative framework that will involve educators, the provinces, unions, employers, and individual Canadians as never before.

Under this strategy, we are putting \$100 million of additional funding into basic entry level training, above and beyond the \$484.4 million that we are spending in that area today.

These and other measures, many with the private sector in the lead role, are geared to increasing our ability to compete globally. But we will never completely succeed as long as there are unemployed Canadians who can't find work because they lack the right skills.

Section 26 of the Unemployment Insurance Act presently allows us to train people who are out of work. Today we are spending some \$350 million out of a total \$13 billion budget in unemployment insurance in exercising that option. We are going to double that allotment to \$700 million. Here too, the plan calls for direct involvement by business and labour as sponsors and as actual operators of training programs. We will support and facilitate their initiatives.

We are also putting another \$150 million into programs for people who face special difficulties getting back into the work force, and people who are on social assistance. Although I resent the implication that 45 makes you an older worker, Mr. Speaker, there are measures for older workers. That is another fact that is coming up and is very important. Any program, any institutionalized practice which discourages a capable Canadian from working simply because of a birth date is wasteful and discriminatory. The unemployment insurance program does that right now. As soon as Canadians turn 65, regardless of their ability or their ambition, it is as if they drop through a trap door. They cannot