

Government Orders

solutions to young people's problems; it is recycled material. The Youth Service Corps mostly offers occupational activities without direct links to the workforce of today and tomorrow.

Again, instead of creating a new program and a new structure, we should better support youth organizations by giving them extra resources to adjust to today's reality. It would be a unique opportunity to combine job training with regional development. Young people should have a chance to become familiar with new computer and other technologies while helping their communities.

In conclusion, I would like to add a few comments: even if the youth service corps appears at first glance to be motivated by good intentions, it hides in my opinion an effort to gain time before tackling the real problems of young people. It is a flashy operation that will reach very few young people, 10,000 in three years, when there are over 600,000 unemployed Canadians between the ages of 16 and 24. The youth service corps is merely a recycled Katimavik program. This is an old remedy for a new problem. It is also one more incursion into an area of provincial jurisdiction. The only positive side that I can see is organizing activities for young people who want to take a sabbatical before making a permanent career choice. However, this is certainly not a priority compared with the needs already identified by organizations involved in training young people.

• (2010)

[English]

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the hon. member but I was particularly interested in his criticisms of the proposed Canadian youth service. He makes a somewhat disparaging reference concerning the Katimavik program which was cut by the previous Tory government. I believe if Katimavik had not been cut we would have seen, with experience, that program blossom into a very useful and very helpful program for young people.

I want to ask the member if he does not believe it is helpful for young people at the critical age of 18, 19, 20 to maybe get out of the home. If they do not have an opportunity to work in a community near their home, they could work in another part of the country. If they are from B.C. they might work in Nova Scotia or Quebec; if they are from Quebec they might work in Ontario or Alberta.

Does he not think it would be very helpful to these young people to have a real work experience even if it is not in their ultimate area of professional expertise later on in life?

[Translation]

Mr. Dubé: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. Obviously, if we were not in a particularly tight financial situation, an experiment like Katimavik would be entirely praiseworthy, and I agree with what he just said.

However, when we compare the need for personal development and experience, travelling and all that with the other needs of youth—needs that I have described in the first part of my speech—young people who are living in extreme poverty, who are desperate to get some kind of occupational training after dropping out of school and then after a while want to get into the labour market and still do not have the proper training and experience they need, when we compare that with the experience of going to another province or another part of one's own province to do the kind of things described in the Youth Service Program such as cleaning up the banks of a river or doing various jobs to beautify the environment, we realize there is no future in cleaning up the environment with brooms and shovels. It does not provide a direct link with the labour market. This kind of work tends to be done by volunteers rather than employees. These jobs are typical volunteer work. In my riding, civic-minded residents do this kind of work for a couple weeks in the spring as volunteers. In fact, it is all part of environmental awareness.

It may have worked from 1980 to 1986. Perhaps the financial resources were there at the time, but we should remember that even in its heyday, the number of young people involved in Katimavik did not exceed 10,000, at a cost of \$10,000 per person.

You may consider this is a stiff price to pay for the experience of living in another province for nine months, as described in the youth service program, Sir—oh, I am sorry—Mr. Speaker, since I am supposed to address the Chair while trying to get the hon. member's attention. Trips and room and board are expensive.

• (2015)

So if we consider other training needs, it seems to me that we must get our priorities straight. If it were up to me personally, obviously I would be more inclined to favour those who will have to enter the labour market. And I would do that because I have looked at various reports and heard the demands of youth organizations which are saying: jobs come first.

During the election campaign and in the throne speech, the Liberal Party told us that jobs came first. Occupational, recreational, leisure and cultural activities are all very interesting, but not in the financial situation we have today.