

Government Orders

Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane): Mr. Speaker, the minister was right when he said that Canadians want to work. This is quite true, and the same applies to Quebecers.

In Matapédia—Matane, the rural riding which I represent, my constituents want to work, and there are no ifs or buts about it. They are prepared to work for hours and do anything at all to put bread and butter on the table for their children.

I have a question for the minister. But first, an example. In our area farmers cannot start sowing because there is still snow in some places, although it is quite warm here. In the forestry industry, working 12 weeks instead of 10 is almost impossible in some places. That means these people will go on welfare.

There is another point I would like to make. The BDCs which help small businesses create jobs seldom invest in venture capital. My question is this: Even if everybody wants to work, and I must say I agree with the minister, would it be possible to take a different approach in a rural riding like mine? Could we not give more power to the BDCs so they could help people in small businesses create jobs and provide work by investing more venture capital?

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member who just spoke mentioned the need for a strategy that goes beyond unemployment insurance to include other measures to promote small and medium-sized businesses and bigger companies as well. We must create jobs. This is very important, not only for Canadians who are out of work but also for other Canadians who are always in danger of becoming unemployed.

It is also very important for the economy in general to have a lower unemployment rate and to get the unemployment rate down as soon as possible.

I do not know at what level unemployment is acceptable, but it certainly is not at the level we have now, which is about 11 per cent. I hope that, in the years to come, we will manage to bring unemployment down to less than 5 per cent. I hope we can, but even that may not be enough. However, it is possible to reduce the unemployment rate.

All I want to say right now in response to the hon. member's question, and I thank him for his question, is that there is a strategy with several components. Unemployment insurance certainly cannot create jobs.

• (1555)

This bill contains some major changes in general strategy in order to get money from the government to support education, training and other ways to help people find jobs.

In this debate we do not have all the other measures that are or will be before the House, but I can assure you that job creation is the cornerstone of the Liberal platform and the government's policy. Every day, in speech after speech, the Prime Minister

keeps repeating that the government's objective continues to be to create jobs in order to give Canadians the dignity of work so that they can put bread and butter on the table for their families.

I can assure the hon. member that the sentiments reflected in his speech will also be reflected in a number of other measures, and meanwhile, the government is pursuing a major goal.

Mr. Jean Landry (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member's remarks and I have a very short question for him.

During the election campaign, seven months and a few days ago, the Liberals told Canadians and Quebecers that they would not touch social programs. Could he explain why, after seven months and a few days, they have decided to cut those programs when they probably could have cut elsewhere and not harm the most vulnerable members of our society? I would like to know what he has to say about that.

Mr. Anderson: Mr. Speaker, it is impossible for a responsible government and a responsible party to promise that there will be no changes to economic and social programs, or in other areas.

In order to have a modern economy, you have to make changes. During the election campaign, the Liberal Party never said that it would not make changes to the social programs, the unemployment insurance system or elsewhere. It never campaigned on that.

In the red book, there are several indications that the government was going to make changes. I can assure the hon. member that, if he reads the Liberal Party's holy book, he will see that the changes that are happening now had been planned during the election campaign.

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, I spoke to Bill C-17 on April 14 during second reading and again in the report stage. I am pleased to be given so many opportunities to talk about the reforms to unemployment insurance and our income security programs.

In my previous speeches I summarized the changes to the unemployment insurance program. Of the six major changes proposed by the government the Reform Party supports five.

We used these previous occasions to encourage the government to go even further. I would like to use an illustration as to how we feel at this time.

If I went out to buy a horse, looked at it and it looked fine, and I began to examine it, I would start with the mouth. I would check its teeth to see how old it is and I would walk around it and check its feet. If I came to the back and I found a leg missing I probably would not accept it. I would not want to buy that horse. That is how we feel about a lot of these changes to the unemployment insurance system. It looks good but there are some flaws in it.