

*National Training Act*

is greater demand for people with higher levels of skills. Hopefully an extension of the training period will remove some of the obstacles to vocational choice. The implementation of this measure may provide greater flexibility to people who are seeking training.

The second positive measure in the bill deals with the removal of the one-year waiting period for training. This applies to recent school graduates and drop-outs and is significant since that waiting period resulted in a wasted year for those people. Hopefully this will also allow some flexibility for those students and others who desire training.

Another aspect of the bill which I think is significant is the relaxation of rules for reporting for sponsor employees. I envisage this measure attracting more sponsors. This is an important aspect because on-the-job training is a very important element of any training which can be offered to Canadians, as my colleague has just emphasized. The reduction of paperwork will be of great assistance to the small business sector in becoming involved in this type of program, since paperwork is one of the most difficult functions that small businesses in our country face. It is an expense which they can ill afford. Anything which can be done to ease that burden will make it easier for sponsors to become involved. Hopefully, this measure will attract more of them.

The third measure which I find positive is the authorization of third party training for employers who are unable to provide training. This will allow improved co-ordination with licensed organizations in fulfilling the specific needs of particular employers. Training programs can be provided to small businesses which could not provide a proper training environment themselves.

Another significant and important measure concerns training Canadians where training is available. An example of this might be our requirements for offshore technologies. This is one area, which requires either foreign training, or the immigration of foreign technicians. Therefore this is an important step, a side benefit of which is the avoidance of institutional costs, for mere trainee support. As a result, the specific training objective is not obstructed or delayed by the costs of creating or supporting institutions.

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Lastly, the increased benefits to apprentices while in training are significant. This can be applied while they are laid off or out of a job. As I understand it, there will be an increase in unemployment insurance benefits paid over that period. From people in my riding to whom I have spoken, I know this will be of significance, as many wanted training but simply could not afford it because they have dependants. As a result, they were not able to go out and expand their opportunities, to increase their abilities and thus qualify for more and better jobs. I hope that as a result of this bill we will see people retraining themselves, achieving higher levels, thus bringing home better pay because of their better skills and the wider range of opportunities available to them. The bill is not perfect, and I am sure that that comes as no surprise to the minister.

For a few moments I want to touch on some of my concerns. The first one is that the whole bill applies to occupations of national importance. The good things throughout this bill are designated for occupations of national importance. The government is implying a priority. If it is good for the country, it will do its best to fill that need. It will increase funding in those areas and provide time extensions for filling those priorities. The question is, just what are those occupations of national importance? Does that mean that we will once again be involved in the whole issue of regional disparities? Does that mean that one sector will be specialized and favoured while another is left to wilt? The whole matter invites a number of questions.

The impact of the bill will be to improve high-skilled training. Of course, all of us are convinced that that is good. We are concerned about some of the implications, but we feel, on par, that what we really want to see is an improvement in high school training in the country. The bill does, however, allow the training of adults immediately upon leaving school, which is logical and of importance and it does not apply to that target group.

The other emphasis of the bill is to encourage specialization. We need specialists but—and I emphasize “but”—the skills which will be developed as a result of this bill will be based on statistical methods or economic models of projections. However, we must remember that they are only predictions, and could therefore, present some real difficulties.

I would like to illustrate that by what could have happened concerning the late tar sands projects. Three years ago in the province of Alberta, anyone would have said that we needed a number of skilled employees or trainees, specialists in the field of tar sands technology. Had this bill been in place at that time, I assume that that would have become a national priority. We would have focused much attention on training many people in those skills. Where would we be today? We would have a bunch of people on the market with skills but with no jobs because, as we all know, those tar sands are not in operation and do not look like they will be in the foreseeable future.

My other concern about encouraging specialization is that we might tend to limit ourselves to developing only specialists and give little consideration to developing multi-skilled work forces which, of course, would give a much wider range of opportunity. We should be developing multi-talented work forces, a labour pool capable of filling a number of roles in a particular, singular setting. We do need some generalists to give our industry greater flexibility and to give the working man or woman the opportunity to move from job to job, if he or she wishes.

That becomes especially applicable in times like today. The German government supports a three-year program for individuals who are called skilled workers when their course is finished. They do not necessarily fill jobs of national importance. These graduates are generalists who can fill a number of