

Government Orders

situation where there was an over-stressed worker and an anguished unemployed person at the welfare office. This was like mixing oil and gas. I am very, very fearful, Mr. Speaker, at what this is going to mean to people.

Mr. Bill Kempling (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity today to speak on Bill C-21. What this bill represents is the natural evolution of a social program, an essential part of this country's compassionate ability to provide income security for those who are out of work and in need.

When the Unemployment Insurance Act came into being in the 1940s only 50 per cent of the labour force was entitled to receive benefits. Those who were ill or who were unable to work were ineligible, as were employees in occupations generally susceptible to unemployment, such as construction.

Today, 95 per cent of the working population is covered by UI, and more than \$10 billion of benefits are distributed annually throughout Canada.

Dozens of alterations and changes over the past 49 years have attempted to bring this program in line with the social and economic times. Today, UI not only protects those who lose their jobs, it also covers seasonal workers, those who are sick, and those on maternity leave.

In the last decade, Mr. Speaker, our labour force has seen some stunning changes faster than anyone can contemplate. The world market is demanding a new breed of worker who can provide technological skills and products. As our knowledge base expands so do global trade links.

• (1220)

While some people in Canada would have us cling to the past of logging, fishing and mining, the world beyond is rushing ahead to learn the technologies needed to compete on a global scale.

At the same time, we have realized that our unemployment insurance system has not progressed fast enough for new labour market needs. It was established in an era when unemployed Canadians would simply have to wait for a mine to open again. In today's economy, based on a diverse array of industry, an unemployed person has more choices. Even in areas of high unemployment

skilled workers are in demand, but Canadian workers cannot fill the needs.

With this bill we intend to offer Canadians an alternative so that they can take advantage of current and future labour market opportunities. Canadians realize that they need new skills and training to keep up with the labour market demands. But they are not getting very much help.

Surveys by the Canadian Labour Market and Productivity Centre show that 41 per cent of full-time employees have received no training over the past two years, another 18 per cent have received less than one week's training while 53 per cent of unskilled workers received no training at all.

It is difficult to overestimate the importance of training in our changing labour market. In terms of economic success we only have to look to countries like Japan to see what a little training input can yield in greater economic output.

In the past this government has occasionally felt like the mouse behind the obstinate elephant. The participation of both business and labour is essential for the development of our labour force. Yet traditionally rivalries have until recently prevented these groups from co-operating in any national effort to keep the supply of labour competitive and job ready.

When the Minister of Employment and Immigration announced the Labour Force Development Strategy in April, she called upon labour and business to head up five task forces on training. The result of their work will shape the way for the strategy and new training opportunities. Rather than being the instigator and the implementor, the government has taken on the role of facilitator. Clearly, the challenges we face are too great for the government to tackle this alone.

The bill before us calls for a co-ordinated approach to solving many of our labour market difficulties. It overhauls UI so that more claimants can receive employment training and experience through the active involvement of our private sector partners. By eliminating some of the disincentives to work, it encourages people to be productive participants in the labour market.

Canadians strongly favour these kinds of changes. An April Decima poll showed that 61 per cent of the people support remodeling UI so that funding is available for more skills development; 92 per cent would change UI to