

Senator Simard: You didn't say that before. I heard \$165 million.

Senator Thériault: You must have missed it.

Senator Simard: Very well, I'll take his word for it. I haveno problem with that.

So you say it's not \$165 million but probably between the two.

Senator Thériault: It could be \$164 million!

Senator Simard: We're getting there!

There was one section of the bill I was concerned about, and in fact it was the subject of Senator Thériault's amendment. It was the fact the government might decide to adopt regulation, at the suggestion of employers and employees who would be the only ones to contribute to the Unemployment Insurance Fund. This could be a threat to fishermen. I am referring to the possibility that \$250 million in benefits would be lost to the fishermen. I asked about that. It was one thing I had a problem with when we sent to Canso. I made inquiries. It is true that according to Bill C-21, a simple regulation could prevent payment of this benefit to fishermen.

The government goes on, and irrespective of what Senator MacEachen and Senator Thériault were saying earlier, although indirectly, but Senator MacEachen told us that once the government had withdrawn its contribution, it no longer had any moral authority over employers and employees to make them pay benefits to fishermen. I don't think that is the case. First of all, the government explained that the plan, the unemployment insurance plan, had been examined in terms of the needs of all people in the Maritimes, all the unemployed, including fishermen, and that employer and employee contributions would be sufficient, except in the case of a catastrophe or an economy that was so poor that the government might be asked to lend 2 or 3 billion in 1992.

Senator Thériault: 3 billion.

Senator Simard: That is a possibility. I don't think that as long as we have senators and members of Parliament from the Maritimes, and especially as long as the process of regulation or deregulation or approval of the new regulations continues, the government would pressure employers and employees who would refuse to pay for Maritime fishermen. I don't think there is any danger of that happening.

First I was told that the regulatory process involved briefings and media coverage. It is a long process. It is not something that can be done in the middle of the night as the Meech Lake foes would say.

Senator Thériault: They struck the Meech Lake Accord in the middle of the night! Could we do the same?

Senator Simard: No, I think the process is sufficiently structured to allow for alerting the public as well as elected and non-elected officials (particularly senators who have the responsibility of representing the regions). This should be enough to prevent even bad Tories, as our friends opposite, especially Senator Gigantès, frequently call us—

Senator Gigantès: I never said that.

Senator Simard: —from thinking about without following up on this.

I think I would have perhaps been more comfortable but I do not see what's so bad about it.

I even asked a witness from Ontario who appeared before the Committee and seemed to tell us, with the encouragement of some Liberal senators, whether it was normal... The question was asked by a Liberal senator whose name I forgot, perhaps it was Senator Thériault. He asked the witness: "How, as an Ontario resident, do you see the taxpayers of that province paying for Atlantic fishermen's benefits? Honourable senators, I did not have any problems with that; it is what I said. And that witness told us he did not have any problems with it either. Either the program is national or it is not. We are talking about a national program.

In spite of Liberal senators' predictions on this Bill, as far as I know, this is not what the government can or wants to do. Bill C-21 will not and should not lead to 10 provincial unemployment insurance systems. It remains a national program. Liberal senators are telling us that the Mulroney government is so obsessed with the free trade agreement and with pleasing the Americans that it wants to harmonize our system with that of the United States. We know there are practically 50 different unemployment insurance systems in that country. We may be bad, but we must be a little logical.

• (1720)

[English]

It stands to reason that you cannot harmonize a Canadian system with 50 different U.S. systems. Even we Tories understand that.

Senator Thériault: The philosophy is the same.

Senator Simard: We may be bad, but we are not that bad. We might be strong, but we are not so strong that we can harmonize something with 50 different systems.

[Translation]

In conclusion, honourable senators, I welcome the initiative to have a further \$350 million reallocated to develop the technical and technological skills of unemployed Canadians who will go on receiving UI benefits.

It is my hope that as soon as possible we can also look at the plan under which \$800 million from the Unemployment Insurance Fund can be invested into co-operative training. This is 50 per cent of the current \$1.7 billion contribution.

I hope we can look at the plan to be submitted by the government, the plan under which labour, the provincial governments, the Canadian government and corporations can spend that money.

For people in our area, even though jobs are getting scarcer although there are jobs, the Canadian government will have to change its ways and encourage, if not decentralization, at least the establishment in our area of government agencies among others to refer to the jurisdiction of the Canadian government and Parliament, and stop accumulate in Ottawa all those new