

*Government Orders*

not only Bill C-30, but also about the broader context of this vital amendment to the Department of Labour Act.

It is important that Canadians understand the long term goals which frame the government's response to the challenges presented by the breakdown of the traditional fishery. They need to understand our efforts to meet these challenges with meaningful, co-ordinated programs that acknowledge the inevitability of change and recognize the urgent need to establish a more diversified, relevant economic base for the Atlantic region.

We also recognize that the human dynamics of this tragic situation calls for a response that is fair and flexible, particularly as it applies to those hardest hit and least able to adjust to the change.

Certainly no group of individuals has been more affected by the decline of the groundfish industry than older fishers and fish plant workers. These are people who have spent their working lives, who have made their living in the fishery and who in many cases now find their chances for re-employment not very encouraging.

That is why the Atlantic groundfish strategy includes a fish plant older worker adjustment program. It is why an amendment to the Department of Labour Act, Bill C-30, is needed to include eligible workers who will reach 55 within their period of eligibility under the strategy.

• (1205)

The Atlantic groundfish strategy was designed in consultation with provinces, unions, businesses, industry and of course the communities and individuals who have been affected by the situation in Atlantic Canada, those individuals whose livelihood has been affected by the dependence that they had on a diminishing resource in that area of Canada.

In developing the comprehensive strategy, all aspects of change were considered, which is why programs that target the circumstances faced by specific groups such as older workers, are included as part of this wide adjustment strategy.

We have introduced a very comprehensive avant garde way of looking at the problem. We are using a modernized, restructured approach toward addressing the issue of change in Atlantic Canada. Fundamental in this discussion is the fact that we as a government, as a people, must understand that the only constant in today's society is change.

It requires new, more innovative ways to deal with the challenges facing the people in Canada. The changing dynamics, the changing configuration of the Canadian economy, particularly in Atlantic Canada, necessitate a new approach, a new way of enhancing our labour market strategy, of finding new ways to deal with structural unemployment, new ways of dealing with the lives, by providing opportunities, by providing the tools, by giving Canadians a tool kit to deal with the type of

change that in many ways has devastated a resource, namely the fishery.

How we deal with that as a government, how we respond to the changing dynamics of Atlantic Canada's economy, is fundamental to the success not only of our region but also of our nation. It goes above and beyond that industry. It speaks to the fact that we as Canadians must abandon old ways, must realize and accept that change is here, that the economy simply does not function the way it used to.

Therefore this crisis in Atlantic Canada has in many ways challenged the traditional approach of dealing with changes in our economy. As we looked and analysed and reviewed and in some ways invented new ways of dealing with this issues, foremost in our minds as always when we are dealing with public policy, when we are dealing with the livelihood and lives of young and old in a region like Atlantic Canada was that we as a government have a responsibility to provide opportunities for our people.

In turn, the responsibility of the people of Atlantic Canada affected by this program is to make the most out of those opportunities provided by the Government of Canada in partnership with all the key stakeholders in the Atlantic Canada community. It is not a question of just giving income support for the sake of income support. We are dealing with changing the dynamics in an economy that requires innovative ways of dealing with the problem of diminishing resources, namely the fishery.

• (1210)

We need a variety of ways of dealing with the issue at hand and to give the people affected by the diminishing resources a variety of tools. The government, always in full partnership with the communities, the businesses and the individuals, has created a series of programs to help with the transition that is necessary in the Atlantic region.

Among others, we have initiatives such as the career planning and employment counselling. These services will help us to assess individual employment possibilities, set goals, develop a personal agenda for the individual Canadian who is looking to improve his or her chances in an economy that is forever changing.

We are also offering a self-employment assistance program. It is a program that will basically kickstart new business outside the fishery. In essence it will give hope and opportunity to Canadians in Atlantic Canada to engage in entrepreneurship training.

Through this process of extensive, wide-ranging consultation, everyone involved was brought into the consultation process. As a government we felt fundamentally that any program which we initiated must have the full support and co-operation of the people.