

• (1550)

It seems that when a measure is brought forward that is the result of many years of study and deliberation, a measure that is long overdue in terms of updating Canada's unemployment insurance system, we hear nothing but doom and gloom and negativism from members on the other side or specious arguments such as the one I heard this morning from my hon. friend for Surrey North who said that this bill represents nothing but an attempt to harmonize Canada's unemployment insurance system with that of the United States. Of course that is nothing but balderdash and nonsense inasmuch as our systems are totally different and we in this country or at least on this side of the House believe it is the job of government to design, plan and implement programs that are in the interests of Canadians. That is what I believe this bill does.

I support this bill because I believe that what it does is move our system toward the 21st century in providing an active rather than a passive approach to unemployment. Our goal is to prepare people for jobs, to assist them in finding those jobs, and to make sure that those jobs exist when people are seeking them.

I must say that although job creation directly is not the purpose of Bill C-21, it is something that this government has a most enviable record at, having created over a million and a half jobs during the five years that we have been in power. We can look backward or we can suggest, as seems to be the aspirations of members opposite, that we should have a system that pays people to sit home. I do not think that is what Canadians want. It is certainly not what people in my part of Nova Scotia want.

What people in our area want is an opportunity to have meaningful, full-time employment that will not only provide them with the resources they need, the money they need to support their families and to maintain their lifestyle but which indeed will give them some personal satisfaction as well.

An unemployment insurance system is—and I think it is very well recognized in this bill—a safety net for people who find themselves in a circumstance of unemployment. Perhaps it is a temporary thing. Perhaps it is because we have a changing economy and a changing society and people have to be prepared to cope with the implications of those changes.

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Change, after all, is a part of history. Change has been with us forever and will to be with us forever. What we need is the courage to face the challenge that comes with that change. I think this bill, in seeking to maintain that safety net while at the same time discouraging use of the funds by those who do not necessarily need it, is unquestionably a step in the right direction.

We are all aware of the economic and fiscal difficulties faced by the country and by the government. People say every day that the place to start in bringing down the deficit is for the government to restrain its own expenditures. One way the government can do that is by making sure that we use those funds, that we do that efficiently, effectively, and to the benefit of Canadians. That is one of the purposes of this bill which is a part of the economic program of the government.

I want to speak briefly in the time that remains on what I see as the impact of this legislation for the people of the South Shore of Nova Scotia. First and foremost I think they will benefit because of the additional funding that is going to be made available through programs of the Canadian Jobs Strategy.

We were delighted last Thursday when the Minister of Employment and Immigration announced that she had designated Shelburne County, Nova Scotia for a Community Futures Program. There have been people working in that area on the consultative committee in Shelburne to bring this day to fruition. Of course the victory that is represented by that designation is theirs as much as it is the minister's, but it is to the minister's credit that she recognized that need and responded to it.

One of the reasons that she is able to respond positively to that, as well as to the request for Inverness and Richmond counties in Nova Scotia for a Community Futures Program, is that the funding is going to be available to enhance community futures. That is one of the direct benefits that is resulting from this bill. Similarly, additional funding will go into the industrial adjustment service from which we on the South Shore have benefited so significantly through programs now being put in place in Port Mouton and in Lockeport.

I might say that I have found during my short stint as a member of Parliament to date that nothing serves the people better than a good working relationship between members of Parliament and public servants working in their area. We are extremely fortunate in the South Shore of Nova Scotia in that we have a man like Jim