

*Adjournment Debate*

**Mr. Murray Cardiff (Parliamentary Secretary to Deputy Prime Minister, President of the Privy Council and Minister of Agriculture):** Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the contribution agreement between the Department of the Secretary of State and the Canadian Council on Social Development for the administration of the Court Challenges Program was scheduled to expire on March 31 of this year.

Through this program, financial assistance is provided for the preparation and defence of test cases involving equality and language rights under the Canadian Constitution. Cases funded under the program have dealt with such issues as discrimination based on mental and physical disabilities, mandatory retirement, equality for native people, discrimination based on marital status and citizenship, and equality for disabled persons. The program, which was introduced in 1985, had a five-year budget of some \$11.5 million.

Notwithstanding the difficult fiscal circumstances, the government agreed to renew the program because it is sensitive to the concerns of minority groups and disadvantaged persons and to their views on the importance of the Court Challenges Program.

The minister announced on May 10, 1990, that the Court Challenges Program would be extended for another five years. It will have a five-year budget of \$13.75 million. However, the program will now be administered by the Human Rights Research and Education Centre of the University of Ottawa. An agreement was signed with the centre on July 22. The Canadian Council on Social Development felt that it was no longer appropriate for it to administer the program and that another organization should assume responsibility for the Court Challenges Program.

Mr. Speaker, I can therefore assure the hon. member that the government fully supports the Court Challenges Program and what it is trying to achieve.

## FISHERIES

**Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to return to a question I asked on December 12 of last year. The question concerned the closure of the Canso fish plant. I want to

review some of the chronology that has taken place since that question was asked on December 12.

On December 11, National Sea Products closed its fish plant operations in Canso, putting 750 people out of work and closing down the town's only industry. This action began a struggle by the people of Canso, a struggle which has been dramatic and which has made Canso a national symbol.

I have pursued that struggle on behalf of the people of Canso here in the House of Commons, asking repeated questions in the House and following this issue since that question on December 12.

Later on that same week of December 12, I was privileged to have the hon. Speaker accept my request for an emergency debate, and on December 18, we debated in this House the crisis in the Atlantic fishery, raising this matter to a national concern. Canso had become a symbol. The people of Canso did not take the closure of their fish plant lying down. They held rallies. The trawler workers travelled to Ottawa to convince the government to reverse its decision. The town council of Canso came to Ottawa. When the provincial government provided a very unacceptable deal in February, they turned it down and continued the fight.

• (1810)

Over the summer, after repeated and lengthy negotiations, the provincial and federal government, through the Minister of Fisheries, worked out a deal with a new consortium called Seafreez Foods Ltd., which has allowed Canso to achieve a new lease on life. This Seafreez deal has enabled up to 500 of the 750 people who were working at Canso to resume their work in the fish plant. Through a complex arrangement with foreign fish operators, it allows the trawlermen in Canso to go back to work.

Today, there are 12 people hired at the Canso plant. They have a new manager, and four trawler boats are ready to go out to sea. The refrigeration unit is being replaced and the plant should be in full operation in mid November. This turn of events is a result of the determination and tenacity of the people of one small community in Canso not to take the loss of their livelihood lying down. It is a symbol of their determination to maintain