

Unemployment Insurance Act

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Shall all notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1520)

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**MEASURE TO AMEND**

The House resumed from Tuesday, June 6, consideration of the motion of Mrs. McDougall: That Bill C-21, an Act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act and the Employment and Immigration Department and Commission Act, be read the second time and referred to a legislative committee; and the amendment of Mr. Allmand (p. 2685).

Mr. André Plourde (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to take part, on behalf of the Government, in the debate on second reading of Bill C-21 amending the Unemployment Insurance Act.

This Bill is of great importance for the future of our country and for working men and women. It shows once again our Government's determination to help workers adjust to technological changes and meet competition in the next decade. While their prosperity depends on a healthy economy, it also depends on their ability and their productivity.

In the 1990s, working men and women will operate in a much more complex world where microelectronics, telecommunications, robotics and automation will impinge on all trades and professions. The pressures of competition, technological change and the demands of the market will thoroughly change the structure of the labour market in Canada and mean that there will be fewer and fewer positions for workers with little education and training.

Already, Mr. Speaker, more than a million workers have difficulty finding work because they lack skills. This trend is expected to increase because of certain demographic factors. In the 1970s, the labour force grew by about 300,000 annually, but the number of workers is expected to grow by only 180,000 (annually) in the 1990s. Statistics Canada reports that 14 per cent of Canadian

manufacturers already have production difficulties due to a lack of skilled labour.

Mr. Speaker, we must always keep in mind the background for this reform: workers want to work and to have steady jobs in which they can fulfill themselves as human beings.

Too many workers are still caught in the vicious circle of odd jobs, unemployment insurance or welfare, which we must break.

In Canada, Mr. Speaker, we spend \$12 billion a year on unemployment insurance benefits and only \$400 million on training for workers. Our country is falling behind other industrial powers with respect to worker training and retraining.

The strategy we are proposing to Canadians, Mr. Speaker, is to change the present use of unemployment insurance funds and reallocate them to train UI recipients, while of course preserving the income safety net unemployment insurance represents for all workers.

Mr. Speaker, the changes are intended to make the Unemployment Insurance Program an active program. Why spend \$12 billion to keep people at home? In fact, one of Québec's greatest poets, Félix Leclerc, said that the best way to kill a man was to pay him to do nothing.

Whatever our friends opposite seem to think, we are not saving any money. Twelve billion dollars will be spent, except that a larger part will go to training, to give additional tools to those who want to meet the challenges of the 1990s. The level of assistance has been definitely enhanced.

The reform would not be worth the paper it was written on if the Government cannot depend on the support of all its economic partners, especially the private sector, which will be asked to play a far more important role. Job training is above all the responsibility of employers and employees, and in the present situation, the private sector must be a more active force. It is in their own interests and those of their employees, whose skills and productivity are essential if businesses are to be competitive.

Today, Canadian businesses are not working hard enough on occupational training. This must improve, Mr. Speaker. It is true that we as a government intend to inject \$230 million into increasing training activities in the private sector through co-operative programs. The private sector will be urged in turn to invest its share of funds in training. The National Skills Development Advisory Board which the Government intends to estab-