

ty with the working class," whose privileges and few rights they are squeezing, "then we had better level with them, we had better open the books, and we had better let them look at what it is we are using as the basis for our calculations when we tell them they must make sacrifices." I think it would make for a healthier social climate. It would even benefit the government.

This is free advice I give you. You might even get a few votes if you stop being duplicitous—cachottier, as they say in French—and stop holding your cards close to your chest and telling the poor, "You are undeserving poor and we can prove it, but you cannot see the proof." That is unacceptable, cruel and disgusting!

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

Senator Guay: You'll have to watch it, Joyce!

Hon. Michael Kirby: Honourable senators, it is with considerable pride, and not a small amount of emotion, that I rise to speak on Bill C-21 in general, and in particular on Senator Thériault's amendment with respect to restoring the government's contribution to fishermen's unemployment insurance benefits. I say that not only because I am a Nova Scotian, and I think, frankly, that any Nova Scotian members of this chamber, regardless of what side of the house they are on, will be very pleased to speak on this issue, and not only because I spent two years of my life in the early 1980s restructuring the fishing industry on the east coast of Canada, but also because my grandfather, my greatgrandfather and, indeed, two generations before that were inshore fishermen in Newfoundland. Therefore, I feel that I have more than a small amount of understanding of the problems faced by fishermen in this country and of the importance and significance that unemployment insurance has to the people in that industry.

● (1510)

When you look at Bill C-21 and at the fishermen's unemployment insurance issue, and you ask yourself what position you ought to take on it, it seems to me that the fundamental place to begin is by saying to yourself: What is my view of the role of the federal government on major issues in Canadian public policy?

I have always begun from the premise that perhaps the most important role of the national government is the role of redistributing income from all Canadians to people and, indeed, to regions that are most in need of it. Therefore, if you look at the proposed changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act as embodied in Bill C-21, and what that bill does to fishermen's unemployment insurance benefits in the light of that redistributive role of the federal government, what you find is a bill that is extremely tough and extremely callous not only on those Canadians that can least afford it or on those Canadians who cannot protect themselves but, in particular, on the people of the Atlantic regions and on one segment of that population, namely, the people engaged in the fishing industry.

In order to explain that point of view, let me give you a couple of examples. Under Bill C-21 we find that the benefits

[Senator Gigantès.]

that have traditionally gone to fishermen, which totalled over \$250 million last year, will no longer come out of the federal treasury but, in fact, will come from other contributors to the unemployment insurance fund. Also, under Bill C-21 it is obvious that a significant number of people who were claimants last year and in the years before will have their benefits either reduced or eliminated. Essentially, a million people who previously have been entitled to UI benefits will either lose those benefits or will have them reduced. Also, a very disproportionate percentage of those people is in the Atlantic provinces.

If you again look at Bill C-21 and say to yourself: How does this bill stack up against the test of the role of the federal government in terms of redistributing income to the people in regions?, you must conclude that, indeed, the bill is sorely lacking. The second point I should like to make with respect to the bill relates specifically to what it does to fishermen. Senator MacEachen, in his remarks yesterday, made the point that, historically, fishermen's unemployment insurance has been an income support program for which the UI system was the delivery mechanism. Those of us who have long supported fishermen's unemployment insurance have never argued that it was a traditional unemployment insurance program; that it was an insurance program in the normal use of that word. We have been perfectly prepared to concede up front that in fact it is an income support program for a group of Canadians who, by virtue of where they live and by virtue of the kind of work they do, are restricted in terms of the number of weeks in which they can be employed in any given year. That, honourable senators, was the rationale behind the program, and yet it is precisely that rationale which this government has chosen to abandon with this bill.

We are often inclined to think that unemployment insurance for fishermen is a fairly recent phenomenon. However, when you look at the history of the Unemployment Insurance Act and the history of fishermen in respect of unemployment insurance, it is interesting to discover that it goes back 30 years. In fact, it was the government of Louis St. Laurent which, in 1958, first introduced UI benefits for fishermen, to the extent that it brought fishermen in under the UI Act. There was a subsequent change in the format so that we now call it fishermen's unemployment insurance, but the fact is that April 1958 was the first time that payments under the UI Act were made to fishermen.

Senator MacEachen referred yesterday to Mr. Mackasey, who as the Minister of Labour in 1970 tabled his white paper in the other place. In that paper there was a clear provision by which, while it excluded self-employed Canadians from having access to UI funds, fishermen were explicitly included. In other words, even 20 years ago the government of the day recognized that fishermen were to be treated differently from other self-employed Canadians and that their contribution would be recognized and treated separately under the UI Act.

Then, in 1976, the Unemployment Insurance Act was further changed, once again to broaden its appeal and its ability to help those people in the Atlantic provinces who most needed