

Bill C-21 will enable us to upgrade the skills of workers to meet business needs. We need first-class employers, teachers and workers or else we are doomed to failure.

We absolutely must base our efforts on training; otherwise, unemployment and social assistance will go up and we will see more poverty and more social problems in our beautiful country. We will have a vicious circle and our economic system will suffer tremendously.

You know that if more people are unemployed, more companies make less money and our governments will probably collect less tax. If we collect less tax and have more unemployment, we are headed straight for an economic recession. That is why it is very important to retrain our workers so that we can produce and be competitive and keep our businesses thriving.

Mr. Speaker, another advantage of this Bill C-21 concerns workers aged 65 and over.

Many people who are 65 or older are in very good health, have great talent and a lot of experience, but they almost had to stop working. With this Bill, we let these people continue to work, to contribute to unemployment insurance and to collect UI benefits. These people 65 and older will be treated like anyone else. And that is a great advantage for our businesses that need these talents, these experienced people 65 and over who will be treated like ordinary citizens—like first-class citizens, in many cases.

We will convince private enterprise to invest more, and that is in the Bill, we will try to convince private companies to invest one and a half billion a year to train their workers, and I quite agree.

We will also try to work a little more with labour, business and the provincial governments. This is really essential in today's world in which we live, with the tremendous competition that we face. Labour, management and the provincial governments, the three of them together with the federal Government, *must* work together to develop low-cost job creation strategies.

• (2350)

We will also allow people 45 and over—because you know, Mr. Speaker, a lot of people 45 and over come and see me in my office. They have lost all hope because they have no jobs anymore and often they are not re-employable. They are told they do not have the skills needed and there is no way they can find a job. Why? Because

Unemployment Insurance Act

they are told they only have grade 9 or grade 8. But 20 years ago grade 9 was pretty good. And now, they are expected to go back to school, to go through the five years of high school. They are asked to go back to school for three or four years. You know, Mr. Speaker, nobody 45 or over has the courage to go back to school for three or four years.

So what we want to achieve with Bill C-21 is provide programs that are adapted to those people. Instead of starting over high school, they can learn, retrain directly on the job. The motivation and the rewards will be much greater for those people.

Mr. Speaker, we know of course there is a natality problem, there often are family problems. We will provide for an increase on UI benefits and medicare benefits, which was not allowed before, medicare benefits, in terms of maternity leave and sick leave. Now, this will be increased from 15 weeks to 30 weeks.

This project will cost the federal Government \$450 million. I think it is worthwhile—I warn the Opposition they should mention it every time they make a speech because it is a unique measure that will help our professional workers who want to keep their jobs while raising a family.

Mr. Speaker, this legislation is adapted to today's world. That is basically what the Bill is all about. It is adapted to today's society. The Opposition said earlier that no changes should be made in the Bill because historically, it had served Canadians well. However, bills are made to be adapted, and I can inform the House that this Bill is truly adapted to today's society. It is a Bill for today's people and today's businesses.

Mr. Speaker, thank you very much, and I am proud to support this Bill today.

[English]

Mr. Joe Fontana (London East): Mr. Speaker, this is truly a sad day in parliamentary history. Not only is the Government ravaging one of Canada's major social policies, but invoking closure. Only allowing seven hours of debate on this issue is an insult to every working man and woman in Canada.

I have just heard Government Members say that we must become more competitive. Why is it then that the Government has reduced R and D funding, has cut training and retraining programs over the past five years, and has cut post-secondary education payments? What