

an unemployment centre and say, "I need a job. I want to work," but you also had to say, "I cannot read or write."

The next step for these people is to find a program or a project in which they can receive help to learn literacy skills and, perhaps, to upgrade those which were once learned but which have since been forgotten or have fallen into disuse. But—and here it is—at the moment, according to the policy of the land, there is a snag. By enrolling in literacy or basic education programs these workers run the risk of losing unemployment insurance benefits. This was pointed out to the committee by Tracy Westell of the Ontario Literacy Coalition when she gave the following example:

There is also the case where a worker is laid off from a plant because his job has become computerized and he cannot read the screen fast enough to do his job efficiently. He wants to read and write better but cannot attend a literacy upgrading program because he is on UI.

Daryl Bean, President of the Public Service Alliance of Canada, also told the committee the following:

We are not getting cooperation to have training for literacy because they say that that is not real training. If it is not training, I do not know what it is.

Honourable senators, this simply defies common sense, and yet our system has tolerated this gross inequity for the better part of a decade. In the early 1980s the federal government changed its policy regarding training support by redirecting the focus of its dollars to higher skilled training geared to specific labour market needs. As part of that policy change, funding for basic training was redirected on the rationale that such training was really just education and, therefore, was the responsibility of the provinces.

The same policy was applied to the benefits available under the Unemployment Insurance Act, thereby creating this gap for unemployed workers in need of skills and literacy training as a route to higher skills training and better jobs. That is wrong. It was wrong then and it is wrong now. In fact, it is worse than wrong. It is unconscionable!

Until illiteracy began to be recognized in Canada in the last four years as the national shame that it is, few public people—that is, people in public life, politicians—really noticed the gap. There was no pressure from those who were its victims, because illiteracy is hidden. Those who suffer from it do so in silence, using all of their energy and considerable skill to conceal it and to develop methods of compensating for it.

Honourable senators, 1990 is the International Year of Literacy. I believe that, in our privileged positions, each one of us must do whatever is possible to put a focus on this issue so that Canadians can understand it and those who suffer from it can get help. We do not want Canadian workers to have no alternative but dependence on welfare. We want Canadian workers to see enough evidence of support and good will in our society that they will have the confidence to come forward and become adult learners.

I know that the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, cares about this issue. I

[Senator Fairbairn.]

know she cares about this gap in the unemployment insurance system. The Prime Minister has spoken eloquently about his government's commitment to fight and eradicate illiteracy. I hope that announcements will be forthcoming to guarantee funding to ensure that programs will be available to those workers who require basic education and literacy-skills training in order to stay in the workforce or to reenter it at a higher level. At the very least, they must be able to learn and to collect unemployment insurance benefits at the same time.

This proposed amendment is a simple one, and I really do not see how anyone in this house, or in the House of Commons or in government, could object to it. It ensures that references in the bill to a "course or program of instruction or training" include training in basic skills and literacy. Some would argue that this kind of interpretation does not require a reference in the legislation. Well, I believe it is essential to have this guarantee nailed down and specified in the legislation.

**The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*:** Senator Fairbairn, if I may interrupt you, I would point out that it is now six o'clock. What is the wish of the Senate?

**Senator Frith:** Ignore the clock.

**Senator Doody:** Do not see the clock.

**The Hon. the Speaker *pro tempore*:** Is it agreed, honourable senators?

**Hon. Senators:** Agreed.

**Senator Fairbairn:** Thank you, honourable senators. I will conclude by saying that I should like to think that this omission was merely an unfortunate oversight in the course of drafting Bill C-21. It is a mistake which is easily corrected. It is also more than that. It is an act of faith towards those whom we have permitted to exist without options. As legislators, we can do no less than redress that error.

**Hon. Senators:** Hear, hear!

On motion of Senator Gigantès, debate adjourned.

● (1750)

### FEDERAL COURT ACT CROWN LIABILITY ACT SUPREME COURT ACT

BILL TO AMEND—SECOND READING

**Hon. Gerald A. Beaudoin** moved the second reading of Bill C-38, to amend the Federal Court Act, the Crown Liability Act, the Supreme Court Act and other acts in consequence thereof.

He said: Honourable senators—

**Senator Frith:** A brief explanation will do!

**Senator Beaudoin:** It is a complex bill.

**Senator Frith:** If it is complex it should go right to the committee.

**Senator Beaudoin:** It is an honour and a privilege today to speak to this house on Bill C-38, an act to amend the Federal