

Right now I am getting calls from people who appeared before our committee telling me that they are very disappointed in us. And I say to the Government of Canada, for my part, at least—and I am not speaking for any of my colleagues—beware, because if you do not do something to lessen the harm that you are imposing on my people in New Brunswick, you may not get any part of your bill at all.

Honourable senators know that when we were in Canso and when we were in St. John's, Newfoundland, my colleagues from the government side were there. We heard from people who were concerned, from people who were afraid. It is possible that Senator Beaudoin and Senator Tremblay do not know what it means, as my leader has said, to be without a job and possibly not to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits. These people may have to go directly to the welfare office. This is what Bill C-21 will do to hundreds of thousands of people in the Atlantic provinces and in other parts of Canada if it is allowed to go through.

We were told in Canso that if we allowed Bill C-21 to go through, it would mean the end of 450 years of fishing, the end of fishermen's livelihoods in that area. Maybe Senator Tremblay does not know that. Maybe Senator Beaudoin does not know that. I am sure that Senator Simard and Senator Robertson know that but for the unemployment insurance program that has been in place since 1941 there would not be even 10 per cent of the fishermen engaged in that industry in Atlantic Canada who would still be there. And I do not pretend for a moment that Bill C-21 abolishes unemployment insurance; it does not. What it does, as was pointed out by Senator Stewart, is to privatize the unemployment insurance program. That is what it does. Only the employer and the employee will contribute to the program if Bill C-21 is allowed to go through.

Honourable senators, I beg my colleagues from the Atlantic provinces to take a look at this legislation. I beg them at least to support the amendments we are proposing, and I ask them to tell the Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Honourable Barbara McDougall, what this will do to the people in Atlantic Canada.

It is time the Conservative government realized that it is a falsehood to say that there are jobs available for everybody in Canada. I have spent 30 years in public life, 20 years in the New Brunswick legislature and 10 years here, and I know because of my past responsibilities that when jobs are available people will work. Why is it that over the last couple of years we have had just 3 per cent and 4 per cent unemployment in Toronto? Is that not proof to the government of the day that people will work when jobs are available? How many thousands of people have had to leave Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and P.E.I. over the last four or five years to go to Toronto to work for six or eight months at a time in order to earn some money and earn the right to collect unemployment insurance benefits so that they can return home and live with their families for nine or ten months out of eighteen months? Is that such an awful situation that the government wants to destroy it?

• (1630)

Is it any wonder that this government is at 20 per cent in the polls? I do not begrudge the government the right to increase or to levy taxes, but they should do so honestly. If the GST has to be 10 per cent, then they must tell the people it has to be 10 per cent. They should not destroy a fundamental program that has been in existence for the betterment of life of the poor people in this country.

Honourable senators, I notice many terrible things in this bill. I cannot understand how the Leader of the Government in the Senate, whom I have watched work in New Brunswick and who appeared to be a compassionate person, can support this bill. I cannot understand how my colleague, Senator Simard, whom I have watched work with the government of New Brunswick and whom I believe to be a compassionate person, can support this bill. How can they, simply because they are told to do so by someone, acquiesce to the wishes of the government—a government that does not understand the problems of the people in Atlantic Canada?

If the deficit is a problem—and I am not denying that it is—I would point out that since 1984 we in this country have experienced our most important economic boom since the second world war. It is my understanding that governments usually have to increase deficits and spending when the economy is bad, but that when the economy is good they collect more revenue and decrease the deficit. What has gone wrong?

Eighty per cent of the people of this country believe, rightly or wrongly, that this government has been too busy with generous subsidies to their friends in big corporations and that they have forgotten about the poor. That is what the people of Canada believe, and it is time the government woke up, because, if they do not, the people will wake them up.

Honourable senators, I am also very concerned about the penalty clause contained in Bill C-21. Why should people be labelled as criminals because they leave a job? Who knows what a person in any particular job has had to put up with and why he or she has had to leave that particular job? Those are personal decisions and decisions that would only be made with good reason. The truth of the matter is that when jobs are available the unemployment rate goes down to 3 per cent or 4 per cent. I am not suggesting that every single person who leaves a job does so with good reason, but I am saying that since 1945 we have learned that people will work when jobs are available.

What does Bill C-21 do to a person who leaves a job? Immediately, he or she is found guilty. We all know that under the justice system in this country a person is innocent until proven guilty, but under this legislation a person would be deemed to be guilty of having left the job without reason. That person is penalized for a minimum of seven weeks and up to twelve weeks. As if that were not bad enough, that person is then penalized down the road for six more years in order to pay back that debt to society. Who could ever imagine a government having such a cold-blooded vision that it would tell people that if they leave their job they are going to be penalized not only for six or twelve weeks but for six years