

Unemployment Insurance Act

It is interesting to note that between 1984 and 1989 employment and training programs were cut by some 30 per cent by the Government, from \$2.2 billion in 1984 when the Liberals left power, to \$1.5 billion in 1989. That is a reduction of some \$700 million.

On April 11, the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mrs. McDougall) announced that she was putting \$800 million back into the program, almost the same amount that the Government had taken out. We have yet to see a penny. The Government is fixing a problem that it created in the first place.

Time after time Members of the House have heard petitions from one coast to the other that we ought not to proceed with the proposed changes to the unemployment insurance fund which will disentitle up to one million Canadians from receiving unemployment insurance benefits.

Canadians are opposed to the so-called harmonization of unemployment insurance to conform with the Free Trade Agreement. This will destroy the historic role of unemployment insurance in this nation. Our system is the envy of many countries around the world, including the United States. The present Government is dismantling the foundation of our social structure which was built upon a sacred trust.

Canadians will not forget what the Government is doing. Next time at the polls, Canadians will not let the Government forget what it has done to them.

Mr. Ken G. Hughes (MacLeod): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise this evening to speak on this most important piece of legislation.

Last fall, as I campaigned throughout my riding of Macleod, people frequently asked me: "When is the Government going to do something to reform the unemployment insurance system?" I am proud to be able to say to my constituents in Lundbreck, Pincher Creek, Vulcan, and other communities that the Government has taken positive, concrete, and well-considered steps to change the UI system to make it more responsive to the real needs of Canadians.

Bill C-21 in a very progressive way changes the nature of our unemployment system. Now, unemployment insurance will be used to train and prepare workers for a job. As the Right Hon. Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) stated: "The best social program is a job". My constitu-

ents and I fundamentally believe that this is an essential principle.

The world is changing. I know Members and colleagues opposite do not like to admit that, but we are entering a time of truly global change.

• (2250)

We are entering a truly global economy and Canada's workforce must be prepared to meet those challenges. In coming years Canada is going to require a highly skilled workforce. We are going to need a well trained and highly productive labour force if Canada is to achieve her rightful place in the global economy.

My constituents recognize that we need a better educated work force and more skilled employees. However, according to a study performed by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business last year, almost one-half, about 43 per cent of Canada's small businesses complain that they cannot find appropriately skilled help. Indeed, Canada currently spends half as much on training and skill development per capita than does the United States. We cannot allow this situation to continue. We must begin a vigorous program to educate and help Canadians train themselves so that we can compete with the rest of the world.

Bill C-21 goes a long way toward addressing this very serious problem. Currently only 2 per cent of UI expenditures are on training Canadians and preparing them to find a job. This Bill proposes to shift the spending priorities of the UI fund to direct up to 15 per cent of spending to preparing Canada's labour force, giving individual Canadians the chance to learn, to build their future through training and skill development. That is for moms, dads, sons, and daughters. I think that is a very positive initiative.

Indeed, through our labour force development strategy the Government will work with and stimulate the private sector to double its commitment to training from \$1.4 billion to nearly \$3 billion by 1994. That is double the investment in Canadians, double the investment in skills. That is a real commitment to people.

We are talking here about reallocating UI funds. We are talking about renewing Canada's priorities and looking to the future. I know that my colleagues opposite do not always like to look to the future. They like to paint a much more bleak future. We are talking about preparing