

Adjournment Debate

Many of the things referred to by the minister had nothing to do with Bill C-21 which I was addressing specifically. When you talk about the social assistance programs as they are referred to under the unemployment provisions, it does not have anything to do with Bill C-21 other than the source of funding which we will come to in a minute. When they talk about entry and re-entry into the labour force, it does not have anything to do with Bill C-21 because people who are entering and re-entering the labour force after a long period of time would not have any way of accessing the unemployment insurance fund which is what Bill C-21 is about. References to human resource development, which is a rather amorphous term and I assume includes all the foregoing, again has nothing to do with Bill C-21.

Bill C-21 has to do with what has been referred to as the gutting of the unemployment insurance program as it has been known in Canada. It has to do with what has been referred to in parts of Canada as the implementation of a social stock prod that was introduced by the government, substantiated by government members during the travelling of the committee subsequent to the summer recess, on the basis that there was a tremendous amount of abuse of the system as it was presently constituted. This is in spite of the fact that time and time again the minister herself said "No, there is not much abuse, abuse is minimal, this is not why we are putting it in. We are putting it in to improve training so people will be able to access all these wonderful jobs that are available in the community".

Since the exchange in the House, a committee of the House has travelled and almost overwhelmingly the response of the Canadian people has been what we anticipated it to be. That is an almost total rejection of the government's scheme. The extra funds that are being made available for all these wonderful social programs which I referred to a moment ago are going to come from the changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act, which is the substance of Bill C-21, and the saving in funds which the government is going to spend elsewhere comes from increased periods of time in which people are going to have to work in order to qualify for unemployment insurance.

• (1815)

I know I do not have a lot of time but I think it is helpful to talk about some of the people who are going to be most direly affected by these changes. When we talk about people who are going to have difficulty qualifying, we are talking about people on the margins of society, for the most part women. Certainly included in that or perhaps in addition to that are single parent mothers whose children are going to suffer enormously because of those longer qualifying periods. As a matter of fact, studies have shown that over 150,000 Canadians will be excluded altogether from these benefits.

I know my time is getting very, very short. I just cannot accept the minister's answers. These changes are brutal, a total distortion of unemployment insurance, and I guess the best way of describing it is that the government is using these changes as a social stock prod and it is inexcusable.

Mr. Bill Kempling (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Employment and Immigration, I want to respond in greater detail to a question of June 15, 1989, by the Member for Saskatoon—Dundurn. The question dealt with changes we are making in the unemployment insurance program.

The hon. member wanted to know about the changes in the unemployment insurance program. The changes we are proposing in the UI program form part of a wider effort this government has taken to ensure that the Canadian labour force is ready for the challenges of the 1990s. These challenges include an increasingly competitive world and trading environment, a diminishing reliance on traditional industries, a rapid growth in the service sector and more sophisticated technology. These are formidable challenges.

If we are to meet these challenges and prosper in the increasingly competitive world environment, we must rely on the skills and resourcefulness of the Canadian people. Labour force development strategy represents a comprehensive approach at equipping Canadians workers with the skills necessary to prepare for these challenges. The government intends to stimulate the commitment of employers and workers to skill excellence through programs that promote and reinforce private sector training. This will strengthen the competitiveness of the Canadian industry.