



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

**THE HONOURABLE JOE VOLPE, P.C., M.P.  
BILL C-50, AN ACT TO AMEND THE EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT  
AND TO INCREASE BENEFITS  
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2009**

Mr. Speaker, I must enter into the debate, especially since we have deprived my Honourable colleague an opportunity to extend the debate by 10 minutes. Again, this is an indication, and this is for the public, of the government trying to control the message and shutting down debate. It has a very poor understanding of parliamentary purpose. I say this especially for the new members who already sit in cabinet. Parliamentary purpose suggests that ideas and plans are put forward. The government proposes and Parliament disposes.

The unfortunate fact is the government has proposed nothing from an economic point of view. Everyone who is watching this debate ought to ask one very simple question.

We have Bill C-50. This is supposed to be such a great bill. It saved the hide of Conservative members, but how many jobs? Some members actually get the point. How many jobs would Bill C-50 create? How many people can go back to work? How many industries are now in a position where they can begin or recommence a business enterprise that will engage people and draw upon the human resources potential of our country? I mean the country, not Conservative ridings. I mean every man and woman who wants to get a job in whatever industry, be they seasonal, be they ongoing, be they in the area of skills development, research, manufacturing or agriculture.

We want to know, we should know and the Canadian public should be advised by government members about the number of industries that now will be more fluid and will be in a position to put up a “help wanted” signs to engage Canadians who want to contribute and who want to earn money so their families can continue both with their future and with the opportunity to build the country.

I have gone through every line of the bill, and I keep asking myself this. Where are the jobs? Where are the industries? I would like to hear the name of one. There is not a single one. This was prompted in part to see if the government could assuage the desires of some members of all caucuses who are in towns that have one industry only, particularly in the lumber industry in northern Quebec, northern Ontario, the interior of British Columbia, parts of Alberta and even parts of Saskatchewan.

I have not referred to the Atlantic provinces just yet, but there are some 350 communities in the country that are dependent on the lumber industry alone, pulp and paper and the like. Members can look through the bill and I challenge them to once find the word “lumber”, to find the words for “pulp and paper”, to find the words “developing new markets for Canadian products”.

Those of us who believe in building the country, and I hesitate to say Liberal because it would mean we are arrogant because we want to build the country, have always bristled at the accusation that we are hewers of wood and drawers of water. However, in today's economic environment, brought about by a Conservative government, would that we could hew some wood so we could supply the appropriate marketplaces in emerging economies elsewhere around the globe.

There is nothing like this in Bill C-50. There is nothing for those 350 communities on which families depend on the lumber industry. There is nothing for those families that are unemployed, because of the mismanagement perpetrated by the government, in a time of crisis for them to draw on the EI system. Why? Because they have already drawn on it.

The conditions built into Bill C-50 by the minister and her cabinet tell us that those 350 communities around the country and others that have other businesses as well are fresh out of luck because that is the mantra by which the government operates, “If you're not on our side, too bad”.

Do we want to have management of an economy? The Minister of Foreign Affairs says that it is a synchronized global recession. Please. What happens? Everybody in the world says that at 10 o'clock sharp we all will go into a recession and Canadians can then use that as an excuse for not doing anything. I have never heard so much junk in my life. When the government is doing well, what does it say is happening in the rest of the world? Nothing. Only in Canada do things go well. That is nonsense too.

The fact is the Conservatives were elected to govern and they decided not to do that. What is the first thing that Canadians want from a government? They want it to manage the economy and to provide for their future. That is the only rationale.

The one job that we have in the House is to approve expenditures to achieve that objective. That expenditure is often attached to getting the rest of the collective to make contributions.

We would be delighted to support a bill that could illustrate that such a plan were in place. Bill C-50 does not have such a plan. It does not help those people who need it most because of the government's mismanagement. It does not help those industries that want to get off the ground.

Things have been going not too badly in Saskatchewan, but there was a time when things were not going that well at all. In a province of one million Canadians, people in Saskatchewan have to think about what they need. They need contributions and management of an agricultural system and an agri-produce system access to markets both to the south and east-west and then beyond. Saskatchewan needs a gateway strategy that would give it an opportunity to access emerging markets and emerging demand elsewhere. That is what is needed in Saskatchewan. As well, Saskatchewan needs the opportunity to develop the petrochemical industries and the big petroleum potash industries that have developed over the course of the last several years.

Is there anything for those industries and those enterprises in Bill C-50? I challenge not only everybody in the House, but anybody watching the debate, to find something for those industries in the bill. They are not going to find a thing.

Why should we support a bill that has nothing for the grand economic scheme of the country? Why should we support a bill that leaves Canadians hanging out to dry? We should not because there is nothing there.

A big fraud is being perpetrated under the bill that suggests the government will actually do something for the unemployed. There are seven conditions and they are associated with period of time, with engagement. All of them really say that anyone who is unemployed can access the employment insurance fund.

The fact is none of the 500,000 unemployed will be able to access the fund. None of those industries, especially the ones in the Golden Horseshoe in southern Ontario, will be able to access the fund. None of the employees of those manufacturing enterprises are going to be able to access greater funds, greater time under Bill C-50.

Members of the government stand up almost boldfaced and say that the bill is the next best thing since sliced bread. I ask them to tell us how many slices there are in this loaf. I ask them to tell us how many jobs will be created. I ask them to tell us the amount of money that will come out. I note there are no dollar values associated with the bill. There is nothing whatsoever.

What they are doing is asking all of the opposition members just to accept that the government is right when it says that it knows what is best for the country. But what is that, exactly? What is the plan? Where are the numbers? Where are the dollar amounts? Where are the employment, job creation, economic stimulus and new market development strategies? There are none. There is just a question: will we support the government? What a question.

We were elected to the House of Commons to help ordinary Canadians achieve their ambitions, to give them a voice. That voice says that we have dreams for our families, that we demand plans, education, training, human resources development, export development, and community development. None of that is in this bill.

How can anyone support a bill that has nothing to offer in terms of ideas, plans, numbers or dollar amounts? Clearly, people need more than that. People deserve more. Real Canadians want, demand and have the right to more from their government. All they have right now is a fraud. Bill C-50 is nothing but a fraud. It contains neither substance nor ideas. It is nothing but subterfuge.

Parliament is not built on subterfuge. Parliament is built on the ambitions of real live Canadians to affect the future for their friends, their community, and members of family to ensure that a society that we perpetuate, that we promote, is seen as a beacon worldwide, and such used to be the case. It used to be that Canada regularly ranked number one in the human rights index all over the world.

Everywhere it was said Canada was the best place to live, the best place for people to effect the possibility of realizing their personal and community ambitions. They would do that because governments were engaged with people. They would do it because there were not media lines to offer as a substitute for answers to questions on substance. The lines, if they were provided, would have said under Bill C-50 these are the number of jobs that will be created and these are the number of industries that are going to be able to function.

Perhaps without introducing a moment of levity, even though we had a great and attentive audience the moment that Conservative members spoke up, they said that is it, we do not want to have an interruption. So it is unfortunate that the public reacts the way that I do. They vote with their feet. They get up and leave at the first expression of life by a member of the government side.

Unfortunately, that first expression of life was one that expressed surprise at being alive. Now if we can take them to the next step, we can say now that we have their awakened attention, perhaps we can repeat some of those questions because it is only by repetition that people will recall their function. The function as Members of Parliament is to represent their people and to represent their ambition, not their own. It is their function to deal with them in a fashion that will allow them to use their own talents, their own expertise to realize an activity, an entrepreneurialism that gives them satisfaction, and, yes indeed, a reward that they can share with those that they hold most dear.

However, Bill C-50 does nothing of that sort. In fact, Bill C-50 is such a crass and void of substance bill that it really insults Canadians. It says, "Please accept the principle that we are the best thing that could happen to the Parliament of Canada and do not ask any questions". That is what the Conservatives asked. Note that members on this side are the only ones who have been asking questions in debate, aside from some snarky comments, and who actually offer a position, one that does not come from the lines that have been dictated by the Prime Minister's Office.

I imagine it would be rather humbling, rather than say humiliating, for members who sit on the cabinet benches or even in the backbenches of the government side to be greeted at the door and given a little pamphlet because it appears now we have gone into government by pamphlets. Pamphleteers have become the government of the day. Here is the pamphlet from which members shall read and read nothing else.

I know you are an avid historian, Mr. Speaker, but it is a little bit like Mao's little red book which was the doctrine of the day. Imagine an entire country in excess of one billion people having to read a little red book.

The Conservatives have reduced that. The Prime Minister's Office has said, "No, our people cannot read that much, they are given a little pamphlet which is a fold-over. That is the sum total of the lines and if you cannot read those lines you cannot offer an opinion".

So here we are in a situation now where the government by pamphleteers is faced with a situation where it cannot explain to the Canadian public why Bill C-50 should be supported. I wonder if the pamphleteers would send out pamphlets saying, "The 500,000 people who had a job before the last election and are no longer employed have the government to thank".

I wonder if those pamphleteers would say those 500,000 families, which now must rely on the munificence of government programs, can no longer do so, because the government of pamphleteers says, "We do not really believe in government engagement in the personal lives of individuals. Let them fend for themselves". I wonder if the government of pamphleteers might dare to send out messages saying, "Your industry has gone under, thanks to the government's action or inaction on a global scale or even on a local scale".

I will resist the temptation to delve in detail, but it will serve the purpose to simply say, "If we cannot put a cheque in front of your enterprise, we are not going to be interested in whether it survives or not". Such is the government of pamphleteers that would have this House accept Bill C-50 as an effective agenda for developing this country.

It is an embarrassing issue to ask Members of Parliament to support a bill devoid of numbers, dollar amounts, job training facilities, job opportunities, employment strategy, developing of industries that have gone under and not likely to recover soon. Then to say that it is all as a result of the international devil called synchronized recession. And if it cannot cope, it would be embarrassing for any government to say it cannot cope. That is what the government is asking the House of Commons to approve. That is the principle that Conservatives are asking opposition members to say yes to when they ask us to support Bill C-50.

I do not think there are members on this side of the House who have intervened in debate who want to give the government approval for that principle.