

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

she is entitled to benefits and she should have been entitled to them on April 27.

The current program has failed this individual and the changes in this legislation would further penalize my constituent, whose case I am only now managing to get on to the entitlement roles. Clause 21 refers to subsection 30(1) of the Act. It talks about penalties for disqualified claimants, and we find that they have increased substantially. We also find that in a case of sexual harassment if a person quits without complaining loudly, simply walks away from the job because the person does not want to go through the hassle of laying sexual harassment charges, the penalties are imposed even though this is considered a good enough excuse to quite one's job. Under the old system the maximum penalty was six weeks. Under this Bill the maximum penalty is from seven to twelve weeks.

My constituent, a young woman with a child, living on a farm, looking for employment in an area where employment is hard to find, would have been without funds not just for 10 weeks but maybe up to 20 weeks. I think that is a very mean-spirited and horrendous situation. That is what the Government is doing to some people in this country.

• (2330)

I listened with interest to some of the speeches which were made on the other side of the House tonight. The Hon. Member for South Shore (Mr. McCreath) earlier mentioned about those who cheat the system and the necessity of stiffer penalties. The problem is that if there are people out there who are cheating the system, we should have people who are employed by the system to find the cheaters and deal with them. Nobody in this world or in this country believes that cheaters should profit.

What we have is a public service which is not well supported. It is dealing with a very poor program, with too many people. It does not have time to deal with those people who are cheating the system. We should not penalize the needy in order to find those who are abusing the system. We should maintain the system, improve the system, and go after those few people in this country who are abusing it. If less than 1 per cent is abusing the system, we should not make it difficult for the other 99 per cent who need the program.

The speaker who spoke before the speaker ahead of me made an interesting comment. He said that this legislation was going to benefit all Canadians. I certainly hope not because that would mean that the Tory policies are working and we all be unemployed. There will be 100 per cent unemployment in this country. If that is what the people on the other side are looking for, then certainly they need legislation to benefit all Canadians.

There are quite a number of things I wanted to say tonight for the benefit of some of the people in my constituency who I know are very interested in what this program is all about. I have a few things to mention on the development of the Unemployment Insurance Program in the country. Before doing that, I wanted to remind the House of the words of my Leader of not too long ago, the New Democratic Party Leader, the Hon. Member for Oshawa (Mr. Broadbent). He said that it was funny the way this Government operates. You have to give money to the corporations to keep them working, but you have to take it away from the poor to keep them working. It is an interesting comment which fits right into the nature of this legislation in front of us today.

The Unemployment Insurance Program in Canada was originally introduced in 1935 with the Bennett Government's Employment and Social Insurance Act. The Act was struck down as unconstitutional in 1937.

In 1940 a provincial agreement was obtained to have the measure accepted as a federal responsibility. From that point on, 1940 until the early 1970s, the program generally expanded with new criteria such as regional benefits, sickness and maternity benefits, and other benefits added to the program.

From the mid to late 1970s the Liberal Government began to undermine that program. General benefit levels were reduced. Family benefits were eliminated, and obstacles placed in the way of new entrance and re-entrance to the workforce.

Not surprisingly, prior to the Conservatives taking over from the Liberals in 1984, the Conservative Government made no mention of the unemployment insurance system during its successful 1984 election campaign. The present Prime Minister's strongest statement on social policy at that time was made during the Leaders' debate when he indicated that no programs protecting