

I suggest that this one-year extension dovetails rather nicely with the time by which the American Congress is expected to pass the trade deal and when it could possibly take effect in a number of sectors. It is possible that next year, after the Government has its trade deal it could do away with the variable entrance requirement.

Perhaps we will hear that this measure was simply introduced to keep the Opposition quiet and that the Government does not sincerely believe that someone from Gander—Twillingate should have access to unemployment insurance more quickly than someone from Toronto, even though the unemployment insurance rate may be 15 or 20 points higher. If that is not the hidden agenda of the Government, why does the Minister propose to extend this for only one year? Why does he not introduce a Bill that will extend it for five to seven years in order to give Canadians the assurance they want?

Frankly, we do not trust the negotiating skills of the Prime Minister. I believe the Minister of State for Immigration (Mr. Weiner) is well motivated. One could breathe a little easier if he were prepared to maintain the variable entrance requirement for the next five to seven years as part of the unemployment insurance package, in the knowledge that our fishermen will be protected and women will still have the option to take pregnancy leave.

The Minister of State for Grains and Oilseeds suggested that I might as well blame the snowfall on this trade deal. I bring to his attention that it is not only the Opposition that has called the future of Canada's social programs into question.

The President of the British Columbia Business Council appeared before the trade committee. We know that British Columbians are forthright and honest, and he told the committee that while he favoured the deal, it could put medicare at risk.

The committee holding hearings on the free trade talks is only visiting the capital cities of each province. It listened to a total of eight interest groups from British Columbia, four of whom were picked by the Government, two by the Liberals and two by the NDP. One of those four chosen by the Government members of the committee was the President of the British Columbia Business Council. He finally admitted that the assertion by the Opposition as well as the National Anti-Poverty Organization, the National Action Committee on the Status of Women and people throughout the country was correct, that our social programs and the unemployment insurance variable entrance requirement, which is a key foundation to the unemployment insurance system, are at risk.

This business spokesman who came before the committee said that this particular deal will pose a threat to medicare.

**Mr. Holtmann:** It proves we are not biased when we select our people.

**Ms. Copps:** They are not biased when they select their people. The Member agrees with the President of the British

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

Columbia Business Council who says that medicare will be threatened as a result of this deal.

Let us get beyond the dollars and cents argument and the glowing rhetoric of the Prime Minister who says that this deal will mean new prosperity and will open new boundaries. The fact is that it will be a continental economic constitution, as referred to by the President of the United States. We are concerned about the impact of this deal on our way of life in Canada, on the education of our children, on the kind of health care system we have, and on the kind of unemployment insurance mechanisms we have to help those who need that social safety net when they are out of a job. Not only are these concerns being expressed by members of the Opposition, but they are also expressed by those Canadians who have been characterized by Government spokesmen as Nazis and regional racists because they want to know what will happen to such things as pregnancy leave and unemployment insurance benefits.

● (1710)

Why did the Government not get a written guarantee in the deal that these programs would never be touched? It could not agree so it said: "We will sign the deal. We will give away energy, drug prices, foreign investment, and in the next five to seven years we will renegotiate what constitutes an unfair subsidy". As far as I am concerned, this particular Bill, the variable entrance requirement which is extended for only one year, is a further piece of evidence to show that the Government's long-term agenda is to dismantle our social programs and our unemployment insurance as we now know it. I would love to go on in much greater detail, but I see the clock, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-90 which is the extension of the variable entrance requirement for a year. We all know that this variable entrance requirement came about because the previous Liberal Government, in its wisdom, saw the need. In fact, it was going to be a wait of 14 weeks before one was able to collect unemployment insurance. I sat on the committee when Bud Cullen was the Minister of Employment and Immigration, and there was considerable flak from the back-benchers, so the Trudeau Government of the day backed off and brought in this variable entrance requirement. In fact, it wrote into the Bill that after a certain period of time the variable entrance requirement would be dropped and 14 weeks would apply right across the country.

I thought I should give you that background information, Mr. Speaker, to this debate on Bill C-90. Subsequent Governments since that time, as the clock hands moved closer together to 12, always brought in a Bill to extend the variable entrance requirements. This is why this Bill is before us today.

In 1984 we had to bring in a Bill. In 1985 and in 1986, we had to bring in a Bill, and now here we are at the crucial hour and we have another Bill before us. The New Democratic