

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Minister of Justice (Mr. Basford) on a question of privilege.

Mr. Basford: I regard that remark as a very sad and unfair reflection both on my very good friend, the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), and myself. We are both sedate, and I took the inference from the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that we were not. I think my friend would agree with me that we are both sedate.

An hon. Member: Sedentary.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the smile I just got from the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield). I think only someone of his capacity could make an appropriate reply to that question of privilege so I will leave it to him to be dealt with later. As for the state of sedation of ministers opposite, perhaps we can leave them until they are 65, when they might be concerned.

● (2040)

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): When we read that point we will be, Stanley.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Some of us need not worry about waiting for that point.

In debating motions Nos. 11 and 12 we are, in effect, discussing the other side of an issue we debated yesterday when discussing motions Nos. 1 and 2. In both cases the sponsors are the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) and the member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). We are expressing our concern about the unfairness the government proposes to inflict on persons between 65 and 70 years of age. The debate yesterday revolved round the proposal to change that part of the Unemployment Insurance Act which permits those persons to contribute to unemployment insurance. Now we are debating changes in the act which will deny people between 65 and 70 years benefits under the act. In other words, the two provisions go together; and we suggest that they do a great disservice to Canadians between 65 and 70 years old. I speak of those in that particular age bracket because those 70 years old and more have already been excluded from the benefits of the Unemployment Insurance act, whereas this bill, as it now stands, will put those between 65 and 70 in the same category.

We all appreciated the speech made yesterday by the hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), who suggested that as the Unemployment Insurance Commission employs controls and methods to prevent people from abusing the act, if those controls can be applied to people in their thirties and forties they can be applied to workers between 65 and 70, and that it is unfair to single out persons over 65 years old who may be working and say to them, "You will not get benefits which other workers who happen to be one or two years younger are getting."

Mr. Béchard: What about those over 70?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I would take the same view. It so happens, if the hon. member is not aware of it, that his government a few years ago took this

[Mr. Basford.]

right away from persons of 70 or over. The Unemployment Insurance Act in its original form had no upper age limit at all. Persons in the labour force had the rights of all other workers, regardless of age.

An hon. Member: What were the benefits then?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): They were a lot less than they are now. Really, I am waiting for my hon. friend to make a speech. He has put a good many words on *Hansard* in the course of this debate, but always from his seat.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): They do not pick up comments.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I know how he sounds sitting down. I wonder how he would sound on his feet.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Because we feel that certain parts of the bill are unfair and discriminate against workers on the basis of age, we feel that those portions of the amending bill should not be passed in their present form.

As I argued yesterday, much more needs to be done for people as they reach the age of retirement. At present we make retirement compulsory, whether people want to retire or can afford to do so. At the moment, 65 is the age of retirement. Surely it is possible for us to devise means whereby Canadians can retire when they want. That is why pensions ought to be available at age 60, although not universally as they are at age 65. I suggest that pensions ought to be available for those who choose to leave the labour market.

If people choose to stay in the labour market when they are between 60 and 65 years old, they should have the right to do so; but they should also have the right, throughout the decade 60 to 70 years of age to contribute to and draw benefits from the unemployment insurance legislation. It is as simple as that. As I say, yesterday we debated the paying inside of the proposition; now we are debating the benefit side of the same legislation.

I was twitting my hon. friend across the way a moment ago about his frequent remarks from his seat and saying I should like to hear him on his feet. That is just part of our exchanges back and forth here.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

An hon. Member: Hurrah, he is on his feet!

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member opposite, for whom I harbour no animosity, wants to know what I think of the bill, he need only look at my speech on second reading. He was in the House, although I do not think any of his colleagues were. As the hon. member's leader said not long ago, we are the party in government and must show more responsibility.