

Unemployment Insurance Act

provide adequate income as the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) himself noted in an address made late in 1973, I quote his words:

The Canada Pension Plan was not set up to provide full retirement income. Rather, it was viewed as the middle tier of a three-tier system; old age security, the Canada Pension Plan and private pension benefits.

This means that older workers must depend on a private pension to provide an adequate income. Statistics Canada has reported that less than 40 per cent of wage and salary earners have a private pension plan. We tried consistently during the committee hearings to bring home to the minister and to the government that when a worker becomes 65 years of age and becomes unemployed, he does not retire from the work force. He must seek work, Mr. Speaker. It is economically important that he continue to seek work. People do not all look forward to the day when they are 65 and will stop working to retire to the cottage, or to Florida. They must continue to seek work. Many of them still have dependants who need support. What the minister has proposed is to cut them loose from the protection of the Unemployment Insurance Act. What a miserly thing to do, Mr. Speaker.

What the minister has admitted—one of his nabobs, the Unemployment Insurance Commissioner, admitted it to the committee—is that there is some problem about the administering of this group of people. He states that the average number of weeks a person of 65 years or over collects benefits is 31 weeks, representing the sum of \$2,800. He says this proves something of a problem for the administration. Surely we do not make legislative decisions based upon what is wise for the administration. Obviously, the minister and his nabobs do.

A 65-year old who is unemployed and seeking work and meets every other requirement of the act is not just a statistic to be administered. Surely we must not allow these people to be thought of in such cold and calculating terms. People in the age group 65 years and up find it very difficult to obtain work. The minister admits this is so. Nevertheless, provided they fulfil the requirements of the act, that is to say, are available for work, capable of working and are actively seeking work, they should be eligible for the benefits under any plan set up in Canada to benefit Canadians who meet the requirements. What the minister has coldly and calculatingly done is to eliminate them from that particular piece of government legislation.

We are not thinking of just a small group of people. Statistics Canada reports that the participation rate in the work force of those 65 to 69 years of age is 29 per cent. So we are not talking about a small group of people. The minister has said of these people—he has inferred it, and hinted—that they are dishonest, that they want to continue to collect private pensions and collect unemployment insurance benefits when they are not actively seeking work. But what the minister is really telling us is that his department is really incapable of enforcing the act. It came out during the committee hearings that the commission is able to segregate groups of people by sex and by age and, having done that, can enforce the regulations with respect to specific groups of people.

Mr. Symes: It is on the computer.

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

Mr. Rodriguez: Certainly it is on the computer. Well, then, surely they can do it for those aged 65 to 69. If it is possible in one instance, it is surely possible to enforce the act with respect to the 65 to 69-year olds, as it is, I would hope, to enforce the act with respect to any other age group and not just selectively on women or on 60 to 65-year old women. We should be able to enforce the part of the legislation that provides that a claimant must be available, capable of working and actively seeking work. Surely it is not beyond the capability of the legion of administrative nabobs that I heard from during the committee hearings to do this.

● (1630)

Mr. Symes: It is easier to make the elderly scapegoats.

Mr. Rodriguez: The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) says that it is easier to make the elderly scapegoats, and it is. It is easier for the minister to do that under the guise that it is administratively difficult to enforce this provision. Indeed, he argues that since we have all these other "rich" social programs, the 65-year olds really do not need to collect unemployment insurance.

Have you noticed, Mr. Speaker, how the government restraint program is operating? It is beautiful the way the government restrains itself. Certainly there is no restraint concerning all the nabobs who were before the committee; I am sure they were making an average of 25 G's a year. The restraint is for those least able to defend themselves, and there are three groups in society who fall into this category—children, women, and the 65-year olds and over. In this particular case the minister is picking on the 65-year olds and over.

An hon. Member: Shame.

Mr. Rodriguez: Certainly it is a shame. The minister comes from the same sort of area of the country as I come from, where it is difficult for a 65-year old to find work. Such a person is unemployed. He goes out to seek work and is conforming with the act in every instance, but he cannot find employment. The minister is telling this person that he has to live on his Canada pension, old age security and GIS, which may bring a grand total, in all its generosity, of about \$3,000 a year. That is how the government restrains itself.

The government says it wants to save about \$125 million. This does not include the \$31 million that is due almost immediately, in 1976, to those who, under the government's amendment, become eligible for the three weeks' retirement benefit which I call a bonus. According to the minister, the government is saving, under the plan, about \$89 million. It is of interest to note that when the legislation having to do with retirement of members of the Senate was amended to set 75 years of age as the retiring age for senators, those already sitting in the Senate were excepted. So far as we are concerned, this is restraint in the wrong area.

If the government were really interested in saving the unemployment insurance fund money, it would take action to increase productivity in this country. If it were interested in raising tax revenue in order to extend present pro-