

*Employment and Immigration*

symbolizes this government's total inability to deal with the country's most pressing problem, that of one million Canadians out of work. Instead of introducing measures to reduce the staggering number of unemployed persons, this government has turned its attention to cutting back the number now receiving unemployment insurance benefits. At a time when the government should be defending its legislation and protecting those who are jobless, we see measures which will place an added burden on those already out of work.

As the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) said, most of us represent constituencies with a substantial number of rural people. They simply cannot accept a job, even if one is available, because of the problem of transportation. That is the major problem in the rural areas of Canada, not the other restrictive measures that were in the old bill. It is the distance and the cost of travelling back and forth to work. A physician, lawyer or other professional person can deduct the cost of transportation from his income tax. However, very seldom is there a working industrial agreement between a company and its employees whereby the employee who has to drive 25 or 30 miles to and from work every day receives a mileage expense. That is most unfair and only exacerbates the situation.

There are absolutely no logical arguments behind the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act which the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) introduced last December. The minister claims that the proposals in Bill C-27 were made as a result not only of his department's so-called comprehensive review of the program but also as a result of a wide variety of studies carried out by other organizations and individuals. The comprehensive review which the Unemployment Insurance Commission published contains, among other things, what is claimed to be a profile of UI claimants. One of the objects of the profile was to provide the basis for discussion of the amendments in Bill C-27. Let us for a moment examine just how comprehensive the study was.

The profile of UI claimants was based on a sample of 8,521 records of separations from employment during January to June, 1974. The profile starts with a table showing that only 27.7 per cent of these separations were due to lay-off, whereas 41.3 per cent were voluntary quits. As a basis for changes to the UI Act, the profile is nothing but a fraud. As the minister knows full well, Canada was, in the first half of 1974, at the height of an economic boom. This is very cogent to this whole discussion. Unemployment then was 5.2 per cent, compared to nearly 8 per cent now. Furthermore, as the latest unemployment statistics bear out, January to June is the time of year when employment rises, when lay-offs are at a minimum and jobs easier to find.

Between the dates the review was carried out, January to June, employment in Canada increased by over one million. Unemployment went down by 76,000 in those months, and over 900,000 people who had been outside the labour force were drawn in and able to find jobs. We are going back to that time span between January and June of 1974 when there was still a tremendous upswing in the economy and a growing

[Mr. Blackburn.]

demand for jobs. Had the minister wanted a truly comprehensive report he should have ensured that the next six months be studied as well. During July to August, 1974, to January and February, 1975, employment fell by 833,000. Unemployment increased by 243,000, and 590,000 people who were in the labour force in July and August, 1974, had been forced out by the following January and February. So much for this comprehensive review study which makes no sense whatsoever. It is not at all relevant to the bill we are discussing. It is outdated and archaic.

The bill is based on a study done during a small time frame when the country was still in a reasonably good economic situation. Employment was high and the demand for jobs was high. To base it on that limited time-span with those limited numbers on the unemployment lists is somewhat of a fraud to perpetrate in this House and push down the throats of members on this side. I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the authors of the study were either totally ignorant of how to compile an unbiased report, or they deliberately chose those months so that the minister could stand in the House last December and claim that the amendments to the UI Act were warranted because of comprehensive studies which were undertaken by his department. He was out by about two years.

Probably the latter was in fact the case, from which I can conclude that the minister was misleading the House with erroneous and biased information. The review also dealt with what it calls the "post-claim behaviour of exhaustees observed from April to October 1973". This is based on a special survey of 2,649 individuals who exhausted their claims in April 1973. The survey found that 63 per cent of exhaustees were able to find work within an average period of six weeks. I loathe that word "exhaustees", Mr. Speaker. Are we not dealing with human beings? Here, again, April of 1973 was a convenient year to pick. Canada was then in the upswing cycle of the boom and unemployment was much lower than it is now. As Lukin Robinson, a Toronto economist, pointed out, the 1973 survey—

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—is an irrelevant and wholly unjustified basis for the UI Commission's current punitive policy of disqualifying as many people as they can from benefits, and if the UI Commission and the government do not know this, they can hardly expect others to be blind to the drastic difference between conditions now and in 1973.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration has yet to put forward any logical arguments for introducing certain amendments to the UI Act. The minister, in proposing a variable entrance requirement of ten to 14 weeks, has never made it clear why he felt this was necessary, aside from the fact that a minimum of 226,000 individuals would be disqualified if the amendment were to pass. I say minimum, Mr. Speaker, because the figure of 226,000 assumes that 50 per cent of those who would have worked only eight to 13 weeks will be able to get longer work. This assumption appears to be based on the "comprehensive" study to which I have already made reference. The only logical reason for this move, in my mind, is that the variable entrance requirement