

Labour

Canada to complete their negotiations very quickly so that the older workers of Ontario can share in these benefits, meagre as they are.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for your attention. I look forward with interest to the remarks of my colleagues and completion of all studies of this Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: On questions or comments, the Hon. Member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the Hon. Member's remarks, but I would like to ask him a question. As he knows, this Bill is being introduced at a time when the unemployment rate is on the rise again. In the last month's statistics, the unemployment rate went from 7.5 per cent to 7.8 per cent, with over one million Canadians unemployed. The rate in all four Atlantic provinces is over 10 per cent. Despite the fact that the Ontario rate is low, in northern Ontario and in eastern Ontario it is quite high. In British Columbia, it is very high. This is also at a time when unemployment insurance is being cut back and when regional development is being cut back.

We see in this Bill terminology such as "the Minister may" enter into agreements with respect to helping older workers. It is a discretionary sort of provision. It does not define what is a permanent reduction in the workforce. It says that periodic assistance payments will be given, but it does not say what they will be.

In view of what looks like a worsening situation—and by the way the Conference Board of Canada said that the Budget was sort of a recession producing Budget; that it was going to make things worse and that the rate of unemployment was going to increase—does the Hon. Member think that this kind of discretionary legislation where the Minister may or may not and where things are not defined will really give assurance to the workers in Canada who are facing rising unemployment rates, restructuring, mergers and so on that this is going to be of any great help to them? When they read this Bill, will they get any great assurance out of it?

Mr. Angus: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Member for his questions. With this Government we have seen the reality of discretion. It tends to err not on the side of

caution but seems to go to great lengths to take away from workers. I would prefer to see this legislation being very specific and saying "shall".

The Member talks about the unemployment rates. The part of Ontario that I come from is not doing as well as the Golden Horseshoe. I think that could be said for most of northern Ontario. There are large lay-offs and more to come. We will feel the brunt of the recession much more quickly than other parts of Ontario.

Certainly this Government could have been doing a lot more in terms of beefing up unemployment insurance, instead of cutting it back to match the American system. It could have been changing the unemployment insurance structure, for example. In northwestern Ontario we are all lumped together; every place from White River to the Manitoba border has one unemployment rate. Therefore, under the variable entrance requirements everybody in that area needs the same number of weeks to qualify or requalify.

What has been happening is that we will have a Dryden and a Thunder Bay doing all right and an Atikokan not doing very well with a 25 per cent unemployment rate. Yet, it is penalized because it is grouped in with northwestern Ontario. I believe it is time that the Government recognized its responsibility to ensure that we talk about local unemployment rates instead of regional unemployment rates. Even if we have to stay with the variable entrance requirements, as opposed as to the philosophy that a job is a job is a job and if you do not have one, you do not have one, you do not have one and therefore should have the same kind of access to the system, at the very least it should be moving in a direction to make the system more fair in terms of the delivery of services.

Mrs. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West): Mr. Speaker, the plight of older workers is a very unique one. Although they are the group that experiences perhaps the lowest unemployment levels, it has a much harder time adjusting to joblessness than any other.

For instance, older workers had a much harder time than any other group of workers in recovering from jobs loss during the recession of the early 1980s. In fact, they