

form of increased premium payments every pay day. In that way the government appears to be reducing its expenditures.

I will come back to what has happened to the funding of unemployment insurance needs in this country and how much less of the total cost the government is paying than it used to be. If we are in trouble, if the cost of unemployment insurance benefits to the people of Canada is now at about \$5 billion, or \$5,000 million a year, it is because this country and the governments which have been in control here have not believed and do not believe in full employment. Canada has the largest rate of unemployment of any of the industrialized countries in the western world.

We in the New Democratic Party believe in full employment, and when we say that full employment is possible in this country, that it is possible to produce a job for every person who wants to work, we do not mean full employment with unemployment at the rate of 4 per cent, as was calculated some years ago by organizations such as the Economic Council of Canada, we not mean unemployment of 6 per cent or more, as calculated by some organizations such as the Economic Council and probably the Conference Board today. When we talk about full employment in this country, we mean work for every Canadian who wants to work at a decent wage. We believe that full employment is still possible and should still be the objective that all Canadian political parties should have as a very high priority.

The hon. member for Bow River spoke about the fact that we still have a very large number of unemployed in this country, over 900,000 according to Statistics Canada, and that there were many employers who were looking for workers and could not find them. I am sure that is true. We must look at the situation as it really is. I am sure that there are some people who do not want to work, but I say to the hon. member for Bow River that that is a small number of people, because the figures from Statistics Canada indicate very clearly that while we have 900,000 or more people unemployed, there are fewer than 50,000 job vacancies.

So I say to the hon. member that if every job vacancy were filled tomorrow—which of course is impossible because many of them are for jobs which require skills which Canadian workers do not have—we would still have more than 800,000 unemployed. That is a fact which governments have to face up. We are not alone in our desire for full employment. Back in 1942 or 1943, a Liberal government which had remembered the depression of the 1930s and the tremendous unemployment which Canada had experienced after World War I, brought out a white paper on its post-war plans in which it set out its objective of full employment. It was very clear and explicit as to what was meant by full employment, the providing of a job for every Canadian who wanted a job.

● (2050)

In 1971 the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) reiterated the fact that "Full employment is the goal of this government." Yet, if we look at the record, we see the dismal record of the Liberal government under the present Prime Minister in

Unemployment Insurance Act

meeting that supposed objective. When the present Prime Minister took office in 1968 the number of unemployed was 360,000 and the rate of unemployment was 4.5 per cent of the labour force. The unemployment situation today is very much more serious. There are over 900,000 unemployed, or almost 8 per cent of the labour force. Those are the official figures. I am sure every member of Parliament knows there are several hundreds of thousands of people unemployed in slow-growth areas such as Quebec, the Atlantic provinces and the Interlake area of Manitoba. These unemployed people are not counted in the figures because the unemployment figures of Statistics Canada are based only on people who are not only unemployed but are actively looking for work.

We all know many parts of Canada where a very large percentage of the labour force is unemployed. Many people have given up looking for work because there is no hope of getting jobs. Because of the recession in the United States, there have been very serious lay-offs recently in the automobile industry and its related industries, in the forest product industry and the construction industry. When we talk about one million unemployed, it is difficult for people—including many of us—to comprehend the magnitude of the problem, the serious situation facing unemployed people.

Each unemployed person faces hardship. Each person drawing unemployment insurance benefits has had his income reduced by at least 40 per cent. According to Statistics Canada, the average unemployment insurance benefits received by people was \$120 a week and their average earnings before going on unemployment insurance was approximately \$200 a week. Given the high cost of living in Canada at this time, a reduction in income of 40 per cent or more is not something people accept very easily. When the unemployment insurance benefits run out, people are reduced to living on welfare at a level which is just a fraction of what they were accustomed to living on when they were working. Largely because we do not have full employment, we have hundreds of thousands and probably millions of people living in poverty.

In see the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) is present this evening. She has spoken frequently and much more eloquently than I about what it means for people to live in poverty. In a speech to the YMCA in May of 1977 she said:

—nearly two million children who live in families with incomes inadequate for their needs and for the 600,000 working families who spend two-thirds or more of their incomes to provide the basic necessities of food, clothing and shelter . . . In 1977, the poorest 20 per cent of Canadian families received less than 6 per cent of total Canadian family income—

That is the situation. When I hear members on either side of the House implying that large numbers of people do not want to work and are happy to live on unemployment insurance or welfare, it is just not true, and certainly they should know better.

I want to come back to the bill we are discussing at the present time.

Mr. Epp: Good.