

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

binational tribunal that in women intensive industries—with women at child bearing age—women benefits are an unfair subsidy? If they do that, and if the binational tribunal finds that unemployment insurance benefits to fishermen, UI benefits to pregnant women, old age security pensions, medicare programs are unfair subsidies, we will have to withdraw those benefits because of that Reagan-Mulroney deal.

This is why, Mr. Speaker,—and it is not hard to guess what the motives of this Government are—this bill which has its roots in liberalism, should take into account the differences between the various regions as far as the accessibility to unemployment insurance is concerned. Why just a one-year extension? I think, Mr. Speaker, that the reason why there is just a one-year extension is that the Government wants to maintain its right of withdrawing those benefits either from fishermen or women in different regions and to replace the variable entrance requirement with a standardized system which would be agreeable to the Americans.

The Government is not trying to give Canadians a satisfactory system by introducing a bill which will apply during only one year. It wants to leave the door open and be ready to say by next year to fishermen and pregnant women: We are sorry, but the Americans have decided it is an unfair subsidy that should be withdrawn. What other motive . . . The Minister has left because he is afraid of having to answer the question. He thought he could conceal the problem to the Opposition and say: "Well, it is a fine bill and we will accept it". We would be ready to approve or endorse it but for more than a year, Mr. Speaker. If the bill is to be in effect for only one year, it is obviously because this Government wants to use an option in the Mulroney-Reagan deal to question the possibility of providing unemployment insurance to fishermen, women and people living in remote areas such as northern Quebec and keep the door open to a plan already set up by the Americans, a plan to pay fishermen which should be scrapped.

That is the position of the Americans who seem to think that handing out unemployment insurance benefits to fishermen should be against the law. But we strongly disagree with that policy. We believe that with this kind of variable entrance requirement we guarantee and protect the right of Canadians from coast to coast to benefit from or have access to programs designed to restore some form of economic balance between regions. Mr. Speaker, the reason why the Minister of State (Grains and Oilseeds) (Mr. Mayer) gets so upset when I raise the matter of benefits for pregnant women, benefits for fishermen, and even benefits for medical assistance such as Medicare, benefits for the elderly and pensions, the reason why he is so upset is that he does not want Canadian men and women to realize the full impact the Reagan-Mulroney agreement might have.

Mr. Speaker, all we are asking the Government, anxious as it is to have the Prime Minister photographed with the President of the United States on January 2, all we are asking the Government is at least to give Canadians all the facts. And

one of these facts, as I see it, highlighted by the ever so slow decision-making process of the Government in introducing this unemployment insurance change for only one year . . . The Government cannot guarantee that no existing or future social program will be affected by the Mulroney-Reagan Agreement. And it cannot give us this guarantee because of a major flaw in their approach. They wanted that trade deal at all cost. The Prime Minister himself said that before striking a deal he wanted to know precisely what would be accepted by the Americans in terms of subsidies. But why is there nothing in writing in the four documents that have been published and distributed by the Government? Why is there nothing in writing saying that the prime Minister will guarantee to Canadians that unemployment insurance benefits will not be affected by this deal, that maternity benefits or medicare will remain untouched? He should guarantee that there will be no change—even if we know that he has already made that kind of commitment, which was worthless anyhow—and that old age security benefits will not be affected by this deal.

Why could they not agree with Americans on what constitutes and unfair subsidy?

● (1700)

[English]

It could not decide or get together with the Americans to agree on what constituted an unfair subsidy. Therefore, it left everything out of the agreement but claims that medicare and pregnancy benefits are safe. However, the opposite is true. There is nothing in writing. Since the two parties have agreed to sit down to negotiate over the next five to seven years what constitutes an unfair subsidy, it is quite clear that our social programs are at risk not only in the future but now. It is quite clear that our unemployment insurance benefits are at risk.

The Americans have already stated their intention to argue that fishermen's benefits are an unfair subsidy. The Americans and Canadians could rationalize that the fishermen are only a small portion of the population who can be cut away as bait and negotiated away in the same fashion as the wine industry and grape growers were negotiated away.

We may see the fishermen ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits some three to seven years down the road. The variable entrance requirement is the key element to fishermen having access to the benefits about which we are speaking.

Why does the Minister introduce a Bill that only extends the period for one year if the Government is convinced that unemployment insurance is not up for grabs in the trade deal? Why does it not extend the period for seven years, beyond the period of negotiation for unfair subsidy, so that Canadians will know that the Government has committed itself in writing to five to seven years of variable entrance requirements, thereby guaranteeing that this particular program will not be put up for grabs during the period of negotiation of an unfair subsidy?