

S. O. 31

insurance benefits remains the same at 10 weeks. However the duration of the benefits is reduced.

Under the current system an individual in the north who works 10 weeks can qualify for unemployment insurance benefits over a 42-week period. The changes in this bill will reduce that benefit period to 39 weeks. Under the current system, an individual in the north who works 18 weeks can qualify for unemployment insurance benefits over a 50-week period. This bill will reduce the benefit period for this worker to 47 weeks.

These changes will have serious consequences for seasonal workers in the northern regions of this country. Seasonal work in the north, unlike the south, is very often short term, project oriented, and has specific termination dates. Workers do not have a lot of other projects to go to.

The north has the highest rate of unemployment in the country. The unemployment rate for the northern region, which comprises the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, is between 20 and 25 per cent. The over-all rate, however, is misleading.

There are wide variations in this rate between the Yukon and the Northwest Territories and between the regions within the Northwest Territories itself. The Baffin, Keewatin and Kitikmeot regions have the highest unemployment rates within the Northwest Territories.

In some communities unemployment rates approach 50 per cent. These high unemployment rates dramatically illustrate the need for substantial economic development initiatives for the north. Cuts to the unemployment insurance program in areas which suffer from economic underdevelopment, without any plans or programs to increase employment opportunities in a significant way, is only going to make these poor regions poorer.

The number of groups in this country opposed to this bill is significant. All the aboriginal and northern groups that appeared before the legislative committee studying the bill were opposed to it. The reasons for their opposition are similar.

Aboriginal communities in the northern parts of the provinces have much in common with northern remote communities. Their economies are largely underdevel-

oped. In the Northwest Territories there are two economies. One is developed and comprises a very small number of communities. The other economy is underdeveloped and a vast majority of communities, about 46, fall into this category. Most of them are in my constituency in the central and eastern Arctic.

When the Northwest Territories Federation of Labour appeared before the legislative committee examining Bill C-21, it had two messages for the committee: leave the system alone and at least attempt to recognize the uniqueness of the northern economy before making any changes to the benefits structure.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Before I call it one o'clock, the hon. member will have six minutes remaining in his debate plus five minutes for questions and comments.

It being one o'clock, I do now leave this chair until two o'clock this day.

The House took recess at 1 p.m.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

STATEMENTS PURSUANT TO S. O. 31

[*English*]

BILL C-43

Mr. George Proud (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, the federal government has finally brought forward legislation regarding abortion. However, this legislation does not address the rights of the unborn child, despite the recommendation of the Supreme Court of Canada. More than 60 petitions bearing the signatures of more than 2,000 Prince Edward Islanders were presented to me calling upon this government to protect foetal rights.

These petitions were not deemed presentable by the clerk of petitions. How can an average Canadian be aware of the strict guidelines for certifying these petitions? My constituents invested a huge effort in collecting these signatures only to discover that their voice will not be heard in this House through petition's tabling. Guidelines for accepting petitions for presentation in