

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

● (2022)

Citizens are entitled to a number of rights and certainly to that of earning an income through their work. Mr. Speaker, instead of giving unemployment insurance to individuals, we should see that they are given the possibility to produce either goods or services; and to suggest that in a country like ours it is impossible to achieve such a goal, that there is not something to be done, that there is not a need for a service however little it may be, Mr. Speaker, that is simply denying evident facts.

We do not insist enough on this basic principle, the individual's right to work and to earn a decent living. Even if there was no work available we agree that all citizens are entitled to an income. Even if we claimed to save a few millions by passing these amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act, Mr. Speaker, we would miscalculate or shift the real problem because should we be asking ourselves whether the benefits should be reduced or not? The basic question we should ask ourselves is this: what are the needs of a laid-off worker who must survive just the same. There is no need to ask ourselves if he is entitled to the benefits or not. Obviously, he is since he must stay alive and meet his needs and those of his family if he has dependants. This is why to tamper with the insurance benefits, Mr. Speaker, is like tampering with the individual's needs, and that is not good enough.

How can it be that one, two or three years ago it was considered that these needs were at a specific level and that today we decide that they are no longer the same? That is ludicrous, Mr. Speaker. That is why this bill falls far short even though it may be inspired by good intentions, namely to end or at least reduce abuses, to give people incentive to work, despite the fact that this administration cannot find work. Instead of taking indirect and unproductive action to force peoples to find work, why not take the necessary action to encourage job creation? Apparently, this will be done afterwards. Why not do it beforehand? Indeed, if the government could find a way to create thousands of jobs in the country, then, Mr. Speaker, we would not have to talk of unemployment because everybody would be working. That would be a positive step. That would show respect for human pride and dignity. That would show consideration for the individual. But the government is always going backwards. It is convinced that the unemployment rate will at best remain the same in the coming year, and I am sure the minister will agree and admit that it is the government's foregone conclusion that the unemployment rate will not go down.

Therefore how can one suggest that this bill will encourage idle workers to seek employment when the minister is certain there is no possibility of creating more jobs? That is unadulterated nonsense. And that is why we are studying false problems and we have lost sight of the real ones. What we should be doing here in the House is discussing how we could possibly create jobs. And to show you how easily this could be

[Mr. Matte.]

done, I can indicate a few ways to go about it. How to create jobs? The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Horner), the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien), the whole government simply have to decide that not a single pair of shoes will be imported into this country as long as Canadian manufacturers have not sold all their inventory and as long as they do not have enough orders to supply every Canadian with shoes. That would solve a problem. Recently the minister responsible for the Canadian Dairy Commission told the Canadian Federation of Industrial Milk Producers that before long there will be massive imports of dairy products like butter and cheese because it costs less to produce butter in New Zealand or Australia. The least I can say is that it is inconsistent, illogical and nonsensical. How can we solve our unemployment problems if we continue to have only one kind of balance in the government, namely asking if we can produce at a cheaper price what can be produced elsewhere, and if it is produced at a cheaper price elsewhere, then we shut down and import. As long as we have that policy it is clear that unemployment will always be going up. Mr. Speaker, it is unacceptable that we should import footwear, shirts, clothes or anything like that when we have workers ready to produce as much as all Canadians will ever need.

It is unacceptable that we should import butter. It is also unacceptable that we should import anything this country can produce and anything it can potentially do. And then I say Canada would be short of manpower. Our country is so big and the potential so great that I am sure 24 million Canadians would not be enough to meet the demand if we just implemented policies to produce at home what we need. Those are policies that would solve the unemployment problem but when we know that the government will continue to set quotas to import products for domestic consumption, will continue to justify, to urge farmers to produce less milk on the pretence that we will import butter because it costs less abroad, as long as there will be imbeciles telling us things which look mathematically true but which do not make any sense in practice, well, Mr. Speaker, we will always continue to be a relatively poor people amid extraordinary abundance.

This is why I denounce the harshness of those changes which cause hardships to the individual who already faces the problem of having lost his job. If anyone should be left alone it is him. He is not to blame. During the 40 hours he works every week he does not have time to think about the administrative measures that should be applied to deal with those problems.

Mr. Speaker, that is our responsibility. This is why I say that in light of the motion before us, and I conclude with these words, it is obvious that until we solve basic problems we should not penalize unemployment insurance recipients, and consequently I am entirely against this bill and in favour of the motion before us.