

it is sound social policy to throw the baby out with the bath water, to use a poor metaphor for this age group, by excluding all of this age group from further coverage. Should we not try again to find a formula that would accommodate those 65 and over who continue to have a bona fide attachment to the labour force? Surely, the principle of personal choice should be exercised here to the greatest degree possible.

With deference to the minister, I am sure that those in the gallery and others have done a considerable amount of study in the past month on the present situation in Sweden with regard to this problem and the handling of old age security. That is still on an experimental basis; it has not yet passed into law. As my colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, stated, there is a voluntary aspect to the Swedish program.

We should not be cutting off from the labour force those 65 years of age. At one end of the scale we are keeping people in college for many years; they are cut off from the labour force. This, of course, results in better employment statistics. By cutting off all those aged 65, taking away their incentive to work by refusing to allow them to collect unemployment insurance benefits even though they have contributed to the fund, this also shows up in the employment statistics. As far as the government is concerned, it affects the revenue picture.

I strongly suggest that we listen to people such as Mr. Baetz. We do not like hearing this because most of us, especially those in this House, live a rather affluent life. We, of course, have heavy expenses. However, as long as I have my seat in this House I want to repeat that we have constantly to remind ourselves that in 1951, 20 per cent of the families of Canada, those on low incomes, were getting 4.4 per cent of the total economic pie, or the total GNP pie. In 1975, the bottom 20 per cent are receiving only 4 per cent. As far as distribution of income in this country is concerned, 60 per cent of the people are only getting 33 per cent of that pie, while 20 per cent are getting 44 per cent. I am proud of Canada, but I am not proud of that fact. I am not proud of the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) who would treat those 65 years of age in the way they are being treated in this bill. That is a shameful, scandalous, Scrooge-like policy on the part of this government.

● (1620)

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make it clear at this point that I rise to speak in favour of the amendment put forward by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). Certainly I could not support the sweeping amendment of the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander). We have on this side of the House begged, cajoled and urged the government to embark on some kind of program—any kind of program—which would stimulate job opportunities in this country.

One of the direct ways it has gone about doing that is with LIP and with LEAP. We could make criticisms of those programs, but in effect they have attempted to get down into the municipalities and have attempted to create employment. Any move on the part of the government to include coverage under the unemployment insurance plan for the sponsors of LIP or LEAP programs—I stress here that I am talking about the sponsors of LIP and LEAP—to

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get them into the work force, possibly giving them some experience in that area so that they might find fulfilling jobs in the future, would meet with our approval.

The clause which my hon. friends and I are concerned about, Mr. Speaker, is clause 1(2) which deals with 65-year olds. I think it appropriate that the bill has come before the House at this time of year, just ten days before Christmas. There sits Scrooge. I can just see him in his dream. Instead of the clanking of chains, he hears the creaking bones. As far the minister is concerned and as far as his hon. friends over there are concerned, with the exception of the hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia), they wish these 65-year olds would just go into a corner and get away from them. They don't want to be bothered. They just wish they would go away and be unemployed on their own.

An hon. Member: You don't know what you are talking about.

Mr. Rodriguez: Members over there from the province of Quebec have a great deal of unemployment to deal with. I can imagine the number of 65-years olds who are involved in that high rate of unemployment. But they do not care. Any Liberal who can stand in his place and support the government on this particular clause has got be sleazy, mean and miserable like the minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rodriguez: The question which occurs to me is why the government, at the advice of its nabobs, has decided to bring in this measure. Having sat in the committee, having looked around at those sittings and having seen all the aparatchiks from the Unemployment Insurance Commission sitting around the room—at least 100 of them—I would like to commend the minister on his one-man attempt to solve the unemployment problem. All we have in evidence is what the minister tells us concerning the reasons for which he has brought the measure forward. The first reason he gives is that we have so many other social programs in the country. He tells us we have the Canada Pension Plan, the old age security plan and the guaranteed income supplement plan. He says in effect, the unemployment insurance program is not designed for people who are 65 years of age or over; it is not intended to be an income supplement for 65-year olds.

We tried to tell the minister during the committee hearings that nobody in our party had suggested we wanted to see the Unemployment Insurance Act used as an income supplement program for 65-year olds. The minister fails to realize, and his nabobs fail to realize, that people of 65 years and over who must still work should still have the choice as to whether they wish to stay under the coverage of the plan or not. After all, Mr. Speaker, it is a plan sponsored by the people of Canada and it discriminates when it prevents people who are 65 and over from participating in the coverage.

The fact of the matter is that the programs the minister talks about—the old age pension, the Canada Pension Plan, the guaranteed income supplement—provide workers of 65 years and over with a monthly benefit which is less than 39 per cent of the average industrial worker's earnings. These benefits were never intended by the government to