

"means a claimant who, subject to subsections 17(3) and (4), has been employed in insurable employment for fourteen or more weeks but less than"

**Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt):** Mr. Speaker, we are dealing now with the first part of Bill C-27 which attempts to change the minor attachment period. We are opposed to this concept of changing the minor attachment period from eight weeks, eventually in three years' time, to 14 weeks. Members tend to forget that after three years the minor attachment period will be 14 weeks of insured employment. We in the NDP object to this tampering with the minor attachment period.

I have been here only a relatively short period of time compared with others who have a history tied up to the Unemployment Insurance Act going back to the year when it was first put into law; there are still members here who were present when the act came into being in 1971. As I said, I have been here only a relatively short space of time and I must express what concerns me.

What concerns me very much came into focus with respect to the Unemployment Insurance Act and the way in which the unemployed in Canada are used as a means of setting up a scapegoat or strawman within which the public can vent its spleen with respect to their frustrations with a government which does not address itself to the problem of unemployment. So we need a scapegoat in much the same way as we needed a scapegoat with respect to rising inflation. The workers' wages were the reason for rising inflation; so the government, which is very adept at whipping up a scapegoat from time to time, whipping up a spectre and laying it out before the people of Canada and then riding to the rescue as a Sir Galahad to save the people of Canada from inflation, lo and behold presented an anti-inflation program under that guise. In much the same way I have seen those who have been unfortunate enough to become unemployed, and there are more than a million of them across the country.

The Minister of State for Fitness and Amateur Sport (Mrs. Campagnolo) said recently, "Now it is becoming blasé". Ministers troop across the country, are proud and trumpet to the people that they should expect rising unemployment and rising food prices. The idea is to inure the people to the concept that they have to live with high unemployment and rising food prices.

In my short span of time in this House I have observed amendments which were brought in to the Unemployment Insurance Act. I saw the changes brought in with Bill C-69 a year or so ago. I observed, in effect, how the former minister of manpower and immigration, now President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Andras), defended the minor attachment period of eight weeks at that time. He kept saying, "This is a red herring which the official opposition, the Conservative party, represented by the hon. member for Hamilton West, keeps dragging across the committee. What we have to do is tighten the eight weeks qualifying period, move it to 12 weeks or possibly to 20". There were many to my right who suggested moving it to 20 weeks before unemployment insurance payments could be collected. I saw the former minister of manpower defending

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that concept and this led me to suspect, and I have since confirmed it in my mind, though I have no empirical evidence, that there must be two groups of bureaucrats warring within the breast of the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen), one arguing that we have to tighten up the act, and the other saying, "Look, this is a red herring. The problem does not lie with the minor attachment period".

I listened to a great defence of the minor attachment period of eight weeks in 1975. I heard it also in 1974 when the estimates were before the committee. I heard a great defence put up by the former minister of manpower and immigration against the suggestions of the Conservative party members sitting on the committee and pushing at that time for a longer minimum attachment period. Mr. Speaker, it is not very often I see eye to eye with the Canadian Association of Mining Companies. Still, this group of associated companies is, I suppose, very conscious of its need to maximize profits and minimize costs. I find this statement in their brief with respect to Bill C-27. It says at page 5:

The association condemns the abuses which some unemployment claimants have made of the eight weeks' qualifying period. It is also aware that this period is shorter than that found in all other foreign jurisdictions, while the maximum level of benefits and the time during which they can be drawn are in excess of those found elsewhere.

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Then this is the important statement.

Nevertheless, with close to one million Canadians unemployed, and with most projections, including those issued by the government and its agencies, indicating the situation may worsen, the time is simply inappropriate from almost every perspective to seek a substantial qualifying period.

No one could ever accuse the Canadian Mining Association of being left-wing. Certainly, no one could accuse them of wanting to protect malingers or of supporting disincentives to the work force of this country. We also discovered that the Manpower department has done some projections on the unemployment rate in this country and on what will be the number of unemployed a few years from now. When we asked for this information in committee, we were told—and maybe there is some justification for this—"We can't tell you this because it might be misinterpreted. We can't give you the background because we might end up with all sorts of problems".

We are experiencing very serious unemployment indeed at the present time. People far more qualified than I project that the present trend of high unemployment will continue possibly into the early 1980s. This government is making changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act which will cause problems. When they first brought in changes they had to do with minor attachment to the work force of eight weeks to 12 weeks, with 20 weeks being major attachment to the work force. If that change was so well thought out, why is the government now coming along with a regional approach to the minor attachment period?

The answer is that the government is responding to the political realities which were trumpeted from the back benches. In effect, the backbench Liberals in Atlantic Canada