

Unemployment Insurance Act

We know that we cannot stop the Government from passing this Bill on second reading tonight. Let me assure you, Mr. Speaker, that we on this side of the House intend to fight tooth and nail during committee meetings, as we cross the country from west to east to hear from working men and women, municipal leaders and small business people, and we intend to let them know exactly what the program and the changes will do to them.

In Canada, 80 per cent of the people who qualify for assistance programs receive those benefits. In contrast, in the United States only 25 per cent of the people who qualify receive any benefits. I do not have to tell Members to look at the increasing problems the United States has with crime, drugs, homelessness and dying on the streets. Is that the type of country that the Government wants us to become? Good social policy is good economic policy. I do not believe that Canadians want to go backward, either.

Mrs. Dorothy Dobbie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise this evening, even at this unearthly hour, to speak on this most important topic. I am particularly pleased to speak this evening after hearing such a lot of contradictory balderdash. I have never heard so much confusing rhetoric and contortion of the facts in my life.

The fact of the matter is that we are dealing with a very simple issue, one that has to do with people, and I would like to put it into perspective. The saddest thing in the world is a healthy, productive individual who is unable to work but wants to. The only thing sadder than that is a healthy, potentially productive individual whose will to work has been sapped by a forced diet of social assistance. These are the hopeless and defeated souls who have forgotten the joys of self-sufficiency, who have been actively discouraged from efforts to be productive by counter-productive programs of social assistance which attempt to make work less attractive in terms of take-home dollars than existing on the efforts of others.

Earlier I heard one of our friends opposite speak with a great deal of eloquence about the sanctity of our unemployment insurance system. I concur with my hon. friend, and agree with this. The unemployment insurance system makes a lot of sense. It is a reasonable and

commendable way to provide sustenance for those who lose their jobs through no fault of their own.

However, surely the thrust of an unemployment insurance program should be to encourage re-employment in industries and jobs that offer security from future gaps in employment because the employee now has the skills or the ability to acquire those skills to grow with the job and adjust to healthy change in the workplace.

Such a program is the one being introduced by the Government today. This program offers hope for self-sufficiency. It offers hope for new horizons to thousands of unemployed people who are aching to get back into the productive and rewarding workplace. This is a program which sees Canadians as having the potential for independence and having the potential to be productive members of this society. This program is one that sees Canadians as having the potential to learn to change, to grow, to do better, and to improve their lifestyles.

• (0010)

Hon. Members opposite have a very sad, distorted and negative view of the Canadian worker. I say shame on those Hon. Members. To hear them tell it, our workforce is incapable of doing anything but going from one dead-end job to the other, with lengthy periods of unemployment to spare in between. That is what they say. As a consolation prize for the lack of a plan, for the lack of the creative energy to solve the problem, Members opposite would offer only easy, insensitive and uncaring answers of a few more bucks.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mrs. Dobbie: Money is a cheap answer. Money does not answer the long-term problem.

Mr. MacDonald (Dartmouth): But it puts food in your belly and a fire in your stove.

Mrs. Dobbie: To continue, sadly, there is never enough money to serve the needs. There never can be enough money, as my hon. friends very well know, to make up for the lack of hope, the desperation, the loss of dignity and the erosion of self-worth that comes from not having a job and, worse, that comes from knowing that one will never have a job because one lacks the skills and training to compete in the job market.

Ms. Clancy: Or there is no market where you live.