

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971 (No. 2)

meaningful in life for them. That is the direction in which the unemployment insurance program should be headed.

• (1530)

I believe that this bill should have been dealt with some time ago. I believe that it is proper that the minister had asked for input from members of Parliament since a Member of Parliament has a better opportunity to indicate how the bill may rectify problems that our constituents are having. The minister reflected this view recently in the House when we were speaking about the workload that some offices in the Unemployment Insurance Commission were taxed with. He indicated that he would look into the matter if hon. members would bring it to his attention. While that is very kind of him it is, after all, his department's responsibility. It is not the responsibility of a member to bring this to his attention.

There should be more prompt payment of claims, which is a matter we should be dealing with today. However, we are setting this aside for another year. I hope that in another year's time we will not once again be dealing with this at the eleventh hour. I hope something can be done in the meantime to have this bill put through with many amendments made to it. We need this Unemployment Insurance Act in our changing society. I do not think that any member would argue with that fact.

Another gross unfairness within the act concerns the regional boundaries. This had also been mentioned by the hon. member for Rosedale with respect to the riding of Simcoe North. I have the privilege and the honour of representing the two townships, Roma and Mara which he mentioned some time ago, which are located just outside of Orillia. These townships are grouped with the Toronto area for unemployment insurance purposes. Also within my riding is the township of Georgina in the region of York where unemployment is the highest of any region in the regional municipality of York. Yet it too is grouped with the city of Toronto. I find that this is very unfair.

I think this bill is long overdue. What grieves me is that my constituents who live in the county of Haliburton and the county of Victoria are probably grouped with other areas where there are different industries and different unemployment problems. The entire riding of Victoria-Haliburton has an unemployment insurance rate of 9.5 per cent. It had been recommended by DREE in 1980 that this area would suffer large scale unemployment by the mid-1980s. Yet this area is not entitled to the DREE program to stimulate employment; it is ignored.

I have met with the minister many times. As late as yesterday, I travelled with the ex-minister responsible for DREE, who is still involved with the Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce, and I asked him about a DREE grant for my area. He said that it is coming and the government is working on it. I have heard this assertion for years but nothing happens.

I realize that we cannot take time on this very important bill and that there are other members who wish to speak to it. But

I believe that we should not deal with this bill which affects so many Canadians in this manner. One would think from the way the debate was conducted by the government House leader that there were many Members of Parliament who would be unemployed. He brought that statement into it. It did not relate whatsoever to the bill we are discussing today.

I believe that the government should not delay any longer and should begin to introduce amendments to this bill immediately. I join in expressing the sentiment of many other members who spoke today that we need reform. We need to have a bill introduced which has some meaning and which will provide some light at the end of the tunnel for the unfortunate unemployed of this motion. We need new programs introduced.

I do not understand why the minister's riding has been chosen to have an ombudsman, as was revealed by the member for Nepean-Carleton. There are many other parts of our country that probably need and should have an ombudsman as well. I do not know when the minister will make that announcement, but it has probably been leaked out by now.

In closing, I would suggest that the government is responsible for the fact that this bill is necessary. The government came in with many promises and all the answers for an ailing economy in the 1980 election, but the economy has become increasingly worse ever since. I hope that the government will take the gravity of this situation to heart. This bill should receive top priority. It has not reached that stage yet and it is the government's responsibility to take it there.

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. I will begin my remarks by saying that I believe it is a tragedy that we are dealing with an unemployment insurance bill in one day, when, had the minister seen fit to introduce it sooner we could have taken it to committee and given it a thorough examination to determine whether it needed further amendments. However, I understand the urgency of the plea.

I come from Calgary, a community in Canada which has been an engine of growth within the last decade. Last Saturday I attended a meeting in that city at which there were many people who had lost their jobs and had either lost or were losing their homes because they could not afford to pay their mortgages at 19 per cent. They especially cannot afford those mortgages when they are unemployed.

I stand here today as someone who has recently experienced what is a very frightening phenomenon, that is, a government which can turn a healthy and thriving community and country into a disaster zone through its ill-conceived policies. We are debating this bill today because there are four times as many unemployed Canadians as there were 14 years ago when the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) took office. It is an achievement to turn out four times as many Canadians in 14 years. That is the undeniable record of the government.

I wish there was more money available for the unemployed. I realize, however, that our taxes are almost double what they were 14 years ago.