

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mr. T. C. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to detain the House, but I do want to register my support of this motion and to say that I think clause 10 of the bill, which excludes persons 65 years of age and over from the benefits of the Unemployment Insurance Act, is both a reprehensible and retrograde step. I could not help but feel, while the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) was speaking, that for one who is usually so cogent in his presentation of an argument, he was today half-hearted. I thought his heart really was not in the arguments he was putting forth. I listened with great interest and I know the minister is a man of great human sympathy; however, I felt it was almost an apology rather than an advocacy of a position which the government has taken.

● (1610)

It seems to me that there can be only two reasons for excluding persons 65 years of age and over from the benefits of the Unemployment Insurance Act. The first is to save money. The minister hinted as much when he said that, after all, this country had limited financial resources, we could not do everything and somewhere we had to draw the line. I am not sure this will save the government any money. If a person can keep on working in the knowledge that unemployment insurance is available to him or her, the government are not called upon to pay that individual the guaranteed income supplement or to pay any welfare under the Canada assistance plan, so I am not sure that on the trade-off the government will save any money. But even if this provision does save money, I question that we want to save money by discriminating against a group of people who have spent a good part of their lives working and paying into the unemployment insurance fund and who at 65 find that, if they continue to work, the benefits of the plan will not be available to them.

The other reason for the legislation is that the government has decided to use the unemployment insurance program as a means of requiring or virtually compelling people to retire from work at 65 or face the penalty of being excluded from the unemployment insurance program. I am one person who has always wanted to see Canada have the kind of social security program that will enable people to retire at 65 if they want to. I agree with the minister that in the last number of years we have built up a fair measure of public support to make it easier for people to retire at 65. But the fact is that, while we want people to retire at 65, I would strongly object to our using measures that compel them to retire at 65. The hon. member across the way seems to be disturbed about something.

Mr. Duquet: I was talking to another hon. member. I would not dare talk to you.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): The hon. member was not talking at all, but gesticulating, and I was not sure whether he wanted to leave the room. I will give him permission, but he should ask the Speaker if he wants to leave the room. The point I was making was that, while it is desirable to make it possible for people to retire at 65 so they can follow hobbies and other avocations they enjoy in their retirement years, it is a totally different

thing to say that if they do not withdraw from the labour force they will be penalized.

It seems to me there are two classes of people that will be hit by this provision. First of all, there are those who cannot afford to retire at 65 from the labour force. It is true, as the minister has said, that they can get the Canada pension and old age security. If the spouse is over 60, then under the new provisions she will get financial assistance. But there are a great many people in the labour force today earning low wages, who have fairly large families, who have not been able to buy a house and who still have to pay high rent. These people cannot afford to drop out of the labour force. We will be saying to these people that if they continue to work they will not have any of the security, in times of periodic unemployment, that persons under 65 are able to enjoy.

I point out to the minister that in my constituency, for instance, men working in the lumber industry and in the forestry industries do seasonal work. They may be out of work for six or eight weeks when the snow closes up the logging camps. For this period of time this legislation will mean for them that they have no revenue at all from the unemployment insurance fund, despite the fact that they have paid into it for years. On the other hand, another individual who is two years younger will receive unemployment insurance. Both these people will go back to work when the logging camps reopen, one having had the benefit of unemployment insurance, the other not. I think this is a reprehensible discrimination against one group of individuals compared to another.

The second group of people that will be affected are those who do not want to retire because they have no particular hobby they want to follow and they are anxious to keep on working. Clause 10 of the bill will penalize these people. In a good many countries elderly people are encouraged to work. For instance, in Great Britain some of the factories now are hiring retired people for four hours a day. They have one shift in the forenoon and another in the afternoon. Their productivity has been comparable to that of workers of a younger age, and they have found that the psychotherapy that results has been excellent. Many of these people, Mr. Speaker, have worked all their lives: they have not learned how to play golf or to do any of the things people usually do when they retire. The fact that they have four hours of work a day and a little extra pay coming in means a great deal to them.

I took a group of people to Sweden some years ago and we spent a long time studying the labour market system in that country. They are training workers of 63, 64 and 65 years of age in new skills and encouraging them to stay at work because of the value not only to the economy but to themselves. As I have said, I am all for making it possible for people to retire early if they want to do so, so they can play and enjoy some of the leisure they have not had in their working years. But if people want to work or, more importantly, need to work in order to get sufficient income to maintain a decent standard of living, surely we ought not to penalize them.

The minister says there is nothing in this legislation that prevents them from continuing to work. No, Mr. Speaker, there is nothing to prevent them from continuing to work, but they continue to work knowing perfectly well that if