

Unemployment Insurance Act

do. We are all concerned about the rehabilitation of criminals. But why in the Unemployment Insurance Act? The minister and his officials stated that they received some representations. Representations from whom—the ordinary Canadian? Could the minister accept this if he saw his mother, a senior citizen, his father or his uncle in the twilight of their lives, being kicked out? If the minister thinks Canadians will accept this, that is a lot of nonsense. I plead with the minister to bring some sanity back into the Unemployment Insurance Act in terms of being at least fair and just.

There are not very many people involved in these two clauses. I think I have made my point. Under the circumstances, there is no way the minister can justify an amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act which indicates to me and to all reasonable people that crime does pay, at the expense of our senior citizens. Therefore, I hope that after the minister gets a blast from one or two more speakers from this side of the House, he will ask that this clause be stood. The minister shakes his head. Shame. If the minister says no without giving this any further consideration, I think he ignores the reality of the matter.

Mr. Baldwin: The government is looking after its friends involved with dredging companies.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander: Let the record show that the House leader on this side is a very wise man.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1720)

Mr. Alexander: He understands the situation here. As I said, we do not want to hold up this bill unnecessarily, and we did have a good crack at it in committee. The minister understands our position. He understands that he has made a mistake. We would only hope by accepting that he could be wrong he would have second thoughts about bringing in these two amendments, particularly when it is noted what he has just done to our senior citizens. He plays Santa Claus to those who are incarcerated and plays Scrooge when it comes to our senior citizens.

My friend from Spadina (Mr. Stollery) laughs, but I know that a man of his worldly travels, with the understanding and compassion that he has expressed for senior citizens, knows that these two clauses are nonsense. If he is the kind of man I think he is, he might want to take part in this debate. But perhaps he has been misled like the rest of the backbenchers over there. They have a lot of sympathy with what we say, but they never get the opportunity to be honest with themselves.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: They might be honest and say, "My God, the hon. member for Hamilton West is right on because he knows the direction the minister is taking." Mr. Speaker, we have to be extremely concerned about the principle the minister is espousing. He is calling for a moratorium on matters in which criminals are involved in terms of unemployment insurance. I think this is vile, odious and obnoxious and I hope that after listening to me he is convinced

[Mr. Alexander.]

that I am right. I ask my colleagues on the other side to break away from partisanship, to bring a sense of justice to this place and vote in favour of the amendments related to clauses 4 and 5.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I have known the official opposition for the last three years—such men as the hon. member for Fundy-Royal (Mr. Fairweather), the hon. member for Egmont (Mr. MacDonald) and the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie). Their leader is a sensitive man who recognizes the need for reform, and that is why this particular amendment is put forward by the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander). We could never accuse him of being Santa Claus, but surely we could expect that his party would live up to the ideals of sensitivity and reformation and would correct past bad practices, enabling those who have been incarcerated because of their mistakes to fit into the fabric of society much more smoothly than in the past.

My party argues against this particular amendment. We recognize that prisoners who have been incarcerated probably have a difficult time obtaining employment. Surely any kind of society that would want these individuals to be reoriented into society must extend to them the things which we recognized prior to 1971. This is nothing new; it was part of the act prior to 1971. Surely these people are injured; surely they are suffering because of their own faults and their mistakes against society. Certainly these are not involuntary acts, as the minister said in committee, but many were made in the full knowledge of what was being done. But it is up to society to ensure that after a sentence has been served, double punishment is not being imposed. They have been behind bars, so surely we do not want to deny them support when they are released, whilst they try to get back into society.

I know the Neanderthals on the far right would find that a repulsive suggestion, but I appeal to the more enlightened minds in this House. I call on them to defeat this amendment of the hon. member for Hamilton West and to treat it as it ought to be treated, with immediate defeat.

Mr. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, I want to say just a brief word. The clause under discussion is a very positive and liberal measure and the minister ought to be congratulated for it. Hon. members with good memories know that clause 4(b) resulted from debates held during private members' hour over the years. If I am not mistaken, during those debates a number of members from the Conservative side spoke in favour of a measure of this kind being included in any future amendment of the Unemployment Insurance Act. The argument was made, and quite rightly, that if you contributed to the fund for a certain period of time and then happened to get into trouble with the law, it would make sense that upon release from prison you could draw income support until you found employment. That is the aim of this clause.

We are not only in favour of the clause, and in opposition to the amendment proposed by the Conservative party, but we congratulate the minister for having included it in this bill.

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, it is always unwise for a member to enter a