

Unemployment Insurance Act

take a position, or that when it takes one it does not care about working women or single people. They do not care enough to look at the effects of their proposals.

I am ashamed to see the sincere member for St. John's East being sucked into that kind of position just because some new member from Toronto in the Conservative party, who was accustomed to working in theory, sat down at a desk in order to write down a few things. The new member wanted to find an outlet for the Tory party and said, "This is a very just position". They have a half-hour meeting, they have a caucus and they have a few arguments, and that is the position of the Tory party. That is why the Tory party will never make it to government. They cannot make up their minds properly.

● (1252)

I must say that the Conservatives have helped me quite a bit. As I have said, I would prefer not to have this kind of bill but I will support it because I agree that for a few years until the economy of this country has picked up again we have to reduce the rate of growth of deficits in Canada. We have to bring the economy into order again. I will support this bill at this time because it will liberate some funds for manpower training and job creation. In this kind of situation I would rather do that than not do anything, and not have these funds available, because our rate of growth of deficits is too high in Canada at this time.

Mr. Bob Rae (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by confessing that our party is in fact seriously split on a major political issue facing the country. I think we should confess to that split. There is a very serious division between us as to which of the other two parties is worse, the Tories or the Liberals.

An hon. Member: Both.

Mr. Rae: I must say that after listening to the two speeches today I would say it is a draw and the Canadian people will soon have a chance to express their own views on the matter.

The conflict that took place in the committee and that is taking place in this House in respect of this measure—and I say this not in the sense that we have a monopoly on virtue in this party, or that any party has a monopoly on virtue—

An hon. Member: You are kidding. That's the first time I have heard that.

Mr. Peters: He is speaking for himself.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rae: I think the conflict within a modern industrial economy such as Canada's is among those people who want to allow the labour market to dictate, to the maximum extent possible, the fate and the well-being of its citizens and the extent to which that society recognizes that labour is not a commodity. That conflict is a very old one in society. It is not something that started with the introduction of this bill, and it is not something that will go away with the passage, the defeat

or the delay of this bill. It is something that will stay with us for quite a long time.

I want to remind the minister that over 140 years ago in England the Poor Law Commissioners were told to come up with a system that would deal with the great problem of vagrancy that existed in that society at that time as well as the problem of unemployment that then existed as a result of the industrial revolution. The Poor Law Commissioners came back with a report that said that the one principle that has to be maintained is that, whatever maintenance is provided for people who are not working, it must be less eligible than the lowest form of labour in that society. That was known as the "less eligibility" principle. We have advanced not one single jot beyond the less eligibility principle that was set forth over 140 years ago.

I want to read just briefly from the report of those commissioners. They stated:

The assumption behind this principle of less eligibility, as it came to be called, was that the indolent, dissipated, and feckless, when faced with a choice between working harder and living in what amounted to a prison, would become industrious, alert, and responsible. The law was expected to achieve miracles. "New life, new energy is infused into the constitution of the pauper," one of the commission's investigators insisted. "He is aroused like one from sleep . . . he surveys his former employers with new eyes. He begs a job—he will not take a denial—he discovers that every one wants something to be done . . . He is ready to turn his hand to anything."

That was the view of the Poor Law Commissioners in 1834. I do not think we have advanced very far beyond the views of the Poor Law Commissioners.

An hon. Member: That is a lot of crap.

Mr. Rae: No, it is not crap. I would point to the principles which have been put forward, and they have been put forward by the minister, by his parliamentary secretary, by civil servants, and by such other distinguished contributors to the debate as the hon. member for LaSalle-Émard-Côte Saint-Paul (Mr. Campbell), who said that more than half the people who are on unemployment insurance were abusers and cheaters. He is the brains trust, I suppose, of the Liberal party in this regard. That is the view of the government, and I dare say it is also the view that is being taken at the current time by the majority of the Conservative party.

For political reasons the Conservative party has been able to play both sides of the fence, and for those of us who were in the committee there was never any question as to where the Conservatives really stood. They wanted more restraint, not less. They wanted more cutbacks, not less. The hon. member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke) put it very well in the debate the other day in this House when he said there were more inequities in this bill than the Conservative party was prepared to put up with. He wanted something that would have some inequities but not as many inequities, as, or different inequities from, the inequities presented by the government. I would suggest that is the choice which the Canadian people have been presented with in this bill and in the amendments proposed by the Conservative party.