

The Address—Mr. Mackasey

help with the administration of cheques; the winter there made the system very vulnerable as their cheques came from as far away as Moncton.

The following are some of the abuses that were removed from the act: the seasonal benefits which, in the eyes of some people, were abused because, theoretically, anybody who gets something for nothing is abusing the fund. So seasonal benefits have been eliminated. Another concerns the rules for retired people, people over 65; the rules are much more restrictive than they were. Now these people cannot draw at the same time unemployment insurance and benefits under the Canada Pension Plan.

What seems to have escaped the notice of critics is the change in the basic entitlement. It used to be limited to 52 weeks and is now limited to 25 weeks. At the end of the twenty-fifth week the plight of the unemployed person is assessed and the period is extended depending on the rate of unemployment in the country generally and in whichever of the 16 regions he happens to live. The 25 weeks can, theoretically, be extended to 51 in Newfoundland, but not in Alberta simply because we are now assessing the probability of a person finding work rather than rewarding him for his past labour attachment. So people should look at this problem in that light.

What about the high benefit level, about which there is much dissent? This question really concerns me. Ten years ago the Gill report recommended benefits of 60 per cent non-taxable. Today 66 2/3 per cent is taxable, consistent with the Carter report. In Holland it is 80 per cent. Of \$100, the average that we are paying out is \$66 to \$67. Although these "bums," these people with maximum disincentive, these Canadians who do not want to work in jobs that do not exist, could theoretically stay unemployed for 51 weeks, the average time of unemployment allowed is only 17, a fact that has been consistently ignored by people who do not appreciate the moral obligation of the government to the unemployed of this country, and by members of the opposition who thought they could ride into power by being as reactionary as some of the newspaper headlines with which we had to put up last September or October.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: I am not saying that the plan is not being abused. There have been abuses of it for 30 years; the average rate is about 3 per cent. Two weeks ago I read an issue of the *Globe and Mail* which reported on a survey of the medical profession in Toronto, carried out by the doctors' own critic. It said that over 10 per cent of the doctors in Toronto abuse medicare. Their average income is \$77,000. Yet when Canadians are broken down into classifications of who is most concerned about abuses of welfare measures, heading the list are professionals, including doctors.

Yesterday I read an article by James Gray, written in Alberta. What is everybody in Alberta so upset about? They have discovered that once women become pregnant they run out and get a job, work for eight weeks, then get laid off, go home and draw maternity benefits. That is the story by Mr. Gray. The slightest bit of research on his part would have indicated that maternity benefits are paid only to women who have at least 20 weeks attachment to

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the work force, not eight, and who had been working at the time of conception—not conceived on the job, but working. When you translate this section of the act into plain English, it means that in order to draw maternity benefits one must be in the work force for 40 weeks. As the hon. member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle) and the new minister would tell you, this is one month longer than is necessary to carry a child, even in Alberta.

• (1720)

I could go on, but I have a little more confidence in people than some members of the opposition, and more than some members in my own party have shown.

An hon. Member: Name them.

Mr. Mackasey: The other day I was hurt when a colleague said publicly that the reason for our defeat was that we went forward too fast with social measures. I was here ten years ago when it was argued that medicare was greatly needed but, of course, not just then. I was here five years ago when the argument was made that the Canada Pension Plan was badly needed but, of course, we should not proceed with it too quickly. Apparently it is never the right time to worry about people. Mr. Speaker, I can tell you who speaks for this group and for that group, but sometimes I have a hard time finding out who speaks for the poor of Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but I must inform him that his time has expired.

Some hon. Members: Continue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Is this agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Mackasey: I have almost finished, Mr. Speaker. Because I do have a degree of affection for the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield)—we never get down to personalities, and I am no longer what he described as the hatchet-man; that honour has been transferred to the minister of health and welfare—for him I have prepared a list of amendments that he can propose when the Unemployment Insurance Act comes before the House for amendment within a couple of weeks, and if he can get the support of the House for them he can bring down the government.

For instance, Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition can move to extend the eight-week period to 12 weeks. This will affect 72,000 people across Canada, according to the statistics available at the end of November. But the hon. member for Bonaville-Twillington (Mr. Lundrigan) and other Conservative members from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, P.E.I. and Quebec should know that of those 72,000 people, about 50,000 live in the Atlantic provinces.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mackasey: I do not know how this will sit with the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe (Mr. Wagner), who during the election promised the fishermen more generous benefits, but at least it is one suggestion that would