

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971 (No. 2)*

that we continue the existing provisions of the act for another year.

• (1220)

When Members of Parliament return, the government can bring forward its proposals for reform and provide the time and opportunity for the very detailed discussions and judgment that this House can bring to such a very important issue.

That is the fundamental importance of this bill. It really gives a degree of security, a degree of assurance and continuity to those presently receiving unemployment insurance, while not bringing about major changes at a time when there is a high degree of turbulence in the economic system. It also ensures that we maintain the provisions with regard to the degree of equity, namely, the variable entrance requirements, to the point in time where we will have a full-scale ranging discussion in this House about a number of reforms.

So, Mr. Speaker, I recommend this short but important bill to members. I hope that we will be able to give it quick dispatch. I would welcome the comments members may have. I hope they will restrain some of their comments about the broader impact of the Unemployment Insurance Act until the time when we bring in the full-ranging reform.

I know that members are anxious to give me the benefit of their wisdom and judgment about the whole unemployment insurance system. But, Mr. Speaker, I would say that it would be somewhat redundant to spend the time of the House talking about something which as yet has not been presented. I think we would be conserving some of the efficiency of time of members and of Parliament if we were to wait until the government comes forward with its proposals, which we would intend to do at the earliest opportunity when there is time in the parliamentary timetable, so that we can then have a discussion based upon reality, based upon something that is before us, rather than something which is hypothetical and speculative. I do not think the time of the House needs to be taken up in wishful thinking or prejudgment but should be spent on something based upon facts.

If that is the case, it would then give us the opportunity, in the time remaining today, to initiate discussion, I would hope, on the training bill. It is a measure that will deal directly with the problem of unemployment by providing major opportunities for all young people and others to get broadened and expanded training opportunities during this period of recession.

So, Mr. Speaker, with the courtesy and co-operation of members of this House, I hope that we may pass in very quick order this unemployment insurance measure. Then for the sake of Canadians we can go on and do something which is equally important, perhaps more important, and this House can show its commitment to deal with the problem of unemployment by engaging in discussion on the training bill, which will give us all the opportunity to do something concrete, real and important for those who are waiting to receive some sign or message of hope.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. David Crombie (Rosedale):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support the minister in his request to have the bill passed through its three stages and therefore be eligible for official passage on June 4, as I think is required by law. We are happy to do that, for a number of reasons.

First of all, we in this party, as I am sure all other members of the House, support the basic philosophy of the unemployment insurance scheme and have done so for many years. As the minister has indicated, it is a scheme to support families in hard times and in between times and it has done so for two and one-half generations. If we did not pass this bill today, Mr. Speaker, we would be changing the variable entrance requirements. It may have been a good scheme to try to take account across the country of the variation in unemployment rates. As people understand it, between ten and 14 weeks are the insurable weeks required, depending on the level of unemployment. Therefore, a high unemployment area will require fewer insurable weeks.

That is the basic understanding of the recommendation which was first brought down in 1977. It was brought down as an amendment in 1977 in order to give effect and flexibility to the scheme, to make it easier on those people in some parts of the country who needed help most, particularly in relation to the fact that there was higher unemployment there.

In 1977, Mr. Speaker, when it was brought down, part of the agreement or understanding was that there would be a general review of the act. That is why a task force was appointed. This idea was put forward in 1977. That part of the act would legislatively die in 1980. It was extended in 1980-81 primarily to allow for the continuation of a review of the act. In 1980 the task force to which the minister has referred was established.

We in this party, Mr. Speaker, look with favour on the work that the task force has been doing, not because we support all of its recommendations but because it is the first time in a long time that we have had a review of the act, an act that has been with us since 1940. It is worth while reminding the House—I do not think the minister needs to be reminded—that it is not some small review that is taking place with respect to the act. In fact, four issues are being addressed. First of all, everyone knows that it has been very difficult to understand administratively how UI works. Consequently, the first issue being addressed by the task force is the complexity of the administration of the program.

Second, this aspect is not well understood by the public, and therefore public comprehension suffers as a result of the 40 years of administration of the plan.

Third, I suppose the question is raised as to the cost-effectiveness of unemployment insurance. It seems to me that this is something the minister could bring forward in terms of a recommendation in that part of the task force report.

Fourth, the labour market impact is important. It is important, obviously, that whatever we are doing with unemployment insurance relates to the labour market in terms of