

50 weeks from 51 weeks for the person who is qualified to claim the maximum, that is, a person who has worked for 26 weeks and who lives in a high unemployment area such as the province of Newfoundland.

However, how is someone who lives in my constituency to be affected, where the unemployment rate is very low? My understanding is that such a person would get a lot less from unemployment insurance than he received in the past. As I read the legislation, I see that with a regional unemployment rate of 6 per cent or less, the weeks of insurable employment in the qualifying period will be 14. That is all—fourteen weeks. I therefore assume that for someone in my constituency to get those 14 weeks he would probably have to work 14 weeks because he comes from a very low unemployment area. So you have to work for 14 weeks in order to qualify for 14 weeks' unemployment insurance benefits. If I am wrong, I hope the minister, in his reply, will comment on this matter, because I am led to believe that those unfortunate enough to be unemployed, such as Mr. Wasylkowski and his co-workers employed at the refinery, would only receive a few weeks of unemployment insurance benefits. I do not think that is very fair at all. It is something which I think will balkanize Canada instead of bringing it closer together.

The unemployment insurance program is one to which everyone who is employed contributes on an equal basis, and therefore should be entitled to receive benefits from it on an equal basis. The motion we are talking about today affects a lot of Canadians in a very negative sense. I wish to give a few illustrations of what I mean. Take the province of Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia the unemployment rate is, I believe, 13.2 per cent. It is very high. I wonder what the Liberals in Nova Scotia think about this amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act. I find that under the existing act, the one the government now wishes to amend, someone who worked for eight weeks could receive benefits for 44 weeks. Under Bill C-27, the bill before us today, and the amended version of Bill C-27 which the minister is talking about in the House, the same person would not receive benefits for 44 weeks; that person would receive benefits for no time at all. He would not receive any benefits; and this despite the fact that such a person could come from Nova Scotia, a province with a very high unemployment rate, and in spite of the fact that this measure is supposed to favour regions which have very high unemployment rates and discriminate against regions like my own which have a very low unemployment rate.

Again, in Nova Scotia, if a person works for ten weeks, under the present act he qualifies for 44 weeks of benefits. Under Bill C-27 he will be cut off entirely. But thanks to members like my hon. friend from Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) who decided to raise a lot of hell about this issue and who really fought hard on it, we have some minor amendments which will help some people in Nova Scotia.

Mr. Rodriguez: Not enough.

Mr. Nystrom: I know it is not enough. The hon. member for Nickel Belt is still very upset. But if the hon. member had

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some help from the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne) then perhaps the act would be improved instead of becoming worse than it is. But the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi, New Brunswick, with an unemployment rate of probably 20 per cent or 30 per cent, is defending these changes in the Unemployment Insurance Act. He is not getting up and fighting for the unemployed in his constituency. I think that is an utter shame. People in his riding should know where he stands. They should know that he fails to stand by their side and stands instead on the side of bad policies and big corporations; that he will not get up here and fight for the unemployed in his region.

It is about time people in the constituencies realized where their members of parliament stand. If he had been standing up in the House like the hon. member for Nickel Belt, we would have had amendments to the act which would have preserved the rights which the unemployed in this country deserve. Because of a fight led by the hon. member for Nickel Belt, the minister has been forced to bring in amendments. Thus, a person who works for ten weeks in Nova Scotia, instead of receiving no benefits at all will get benefits for 42 weeks instead of 44. It is not as good as it was, but still it is better than it would have been under the original ideas of the minister from Sarnia, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen).

Taking the same example of a person in Nova Scotia, if that person worked for 20 weeks and suddenly became unemployed, he would qualify for 51 weeks of benefit under the present act, the one which is being amended today. But under Bill C-27 that person would have had his benefit period cut back to 40 weeks. Because of the fight put up by the hon. member for Nickel Belt—the credit really has to go to him—that person will now qualify, under the amendment, for 50 weeks of benefits.

I keep bringing in the name of the hon. member for Nickel Belt because I know that members of the Conservative party have long been in favour of tightening up the Unemployment Insurance Act. I remember the members of the Conservative party in the 1972 campaign chastising the government—the former minister, Bryce Mackasey—for running a loose show, for letting people take advantage of the Unemployment Insurance Act. They want to lengthen the qualifying period a person has to work before he can claim benefits. The Conservative party initiated the tightening up of the Unemployment Insurance Act. We now have some of them going into high unemployment regions like Atlantic Canada. I was in Verdun for the by-election campaign and heard them criticizing the government for tightening up the act. I suggest that the members of the Conservative party are real hypocrites.

• (1610)

The hon. member for Nickel Belt has brought forward decent amendments to this legislation and he, with the support of a few members in the committee, but under his leadership, forced the government to back down. I should like the Conservative members to stand up in this House and do some