

Employment and Immigration

Mr. Speaker: The second grouping would then be motions Nos. 11, 15, 29, 30 and 32. Is that agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): Mr. Speaker, the motion before us extends the minimum attachment period from eight weeks to ten weeks and as far as 14 weeks, depending upon the region in which the applicant lives. After three years, the minimum attachment period is extended to 14 weeks for all regions. This concerns me despite the fact that I come from the relatively low unemployment area of Saskatchewan, although Manitoba and Alberta are also low.

As the law stands, a worker can qualify for unemployment insurance benefits if he loses his job, or if a job is not available, after being in the labour market for eight weeks, but if this motion is adopted it will mean he would have to be in the labour force for ten to 14 weeks, based on the unemployment rate. I would assume that in a low unemployment area like the prairies it would be at least 14 weeks. Some people may say it is fair to treat high unemployment areas in a more liberal fashion than low unemployment areas, but I suggest that is not necessarily the case. In an area like mine, where the official unemployment rate is only about 4 per cent, there are many people with problems similar to those of people in northern Ontario, northern British Columbia, eastern Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, and they should be able to qualify for UIC benefits in the same way. There are people in my area who do not have the training, job skills or education required and are put into jobs which do not last very long.

It seems to me that this type of bill balkanizes the country and different areas will be treated differently. I do not think this is a very good precedent to set. All Canadians make the same contributions and should be able to draw the same benefits. A worker in my area makes the same contribution as a worker in Sault Ste. Marie, in Cape Breton or in Matane, but in order to draw benefits he has to meet different criteria and that is not really fair. To me, this discriminates against people working in my riding. They make the same contributions as other workers and often do the same job.

● (1120)

For example, in my riding there is large potash mine and a large CNR terminal. There are also large mines and large terminals in the maritimes. Workers in my riding, as in the maritimes, make the same contribution to the unemployment insurance fund, but under the new regulations, if a worker in my riding loses his job after he has worked 12 weeks, he will not qualify for unemployment insurance, whereas workers in the maritimes who have done the same job for the same time and lose their job will qualify for benefits. Clearly, the minister is establishing a bad principle. I point out that both workers pay the same premiums but they will not be treated equally. That shows, I suggest, how unfair is this part of the bill which the minister asks us to support.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): It does little for the cause of national unity.

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

Mr. Nystrom: As the hon. member sitting in front of me says, it will do little for the cause of national unity. It will make this country's working people cynical. Certainly, if people in my riding lose their jobs, they will look cynically upon how people in other parts of the country are treated. The minister should not do this. The bill should treat the entire country uniformly, instead of attempting to balkanize it. The minister's proposal will do just that.

Apparently, the minister is more concerned about stopping the few people who abuse the plan than about solving the problem of unemployment. Mr. Speaker, this country's problem is not that a few people abuse the unemployment insurance fund; the problem is unemployment, finding jobs for people who want to work. If we had jobs for all Canadians, the vast majority would prefer working to drawing unemployment insurance. The minister seems to be more concerned about stopping a few abuses than solving unemployment, more interested in pumping billions of dollars into the unemployment insurance fund than in using imagination and encouraging the government to promote new policies which would create jobs.

Mr. Speaker, we could do much to create jobs for Canadians. For instance, we could embark upon a national insulation program of the kind my party has advocated since last October, or a housebuilding program which would put people to work quickly, or national winter works programs which could be used to constructive benefit in our communities. Above all, we must bring about long-term economic changes in this country. We must encourage manufacturing and the processing of raw materials in Canada before they are exported. Mr. Speaker, Canada imports more manufactured goods per capita than any other industrialized country, which is a crime. Manufacturing is labour-intensive; resource development is capital-intensive. Therefore, we are exporting our jobs to the United States, Europe, Japan and elsewhere, and importing unemployment from those same areas of the world.

We must change this policy if we want full employment in this country. Instead of embarking upon such imaginative policies, the government should crack down on the few who abuse the unemployment insurance plan, to sue them, as the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Symes) says, as scapegoats. The government is not grappling with the fundamental problem, that of providing jobs for Canadians from coast to coast. The minister bases his proposal strictly on the bureaucracy's nationwide unemployment figures. But in my riding many of the unemployed are not included in official unemployment figures. There are seven Indian reserves in my riding, on some of which unemployment is running at 90 per cent. On the best of them, about half the Indian people are unemployed. So that you can safely say between 60 per cent and 80 per cent of the people on the reserves are unemployed. They are not included in the Statistics Canada figures because they are treaty Indians. If you included them, you would find that the unemployment rate in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta is higher than the official figures show.

Under the new regulations our native and Indian people living in the prairie provinces will not be treated as generously