

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

unanimous recommendations. These recommendations were supported by members of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party. The Government refused them all. It did not accept one recommendation, and it did not accept any of the recommendations made by the Forget Commission.

● (1140)

By the way, Mr. Speaker, many of the 90 recommendations made by the parliamentary committee, of which I was a member, were similar to the Forget recommendations.

We rejected the Forget recommendation for annualization and for ending regionally extended benefits, but many of our 90 recommendations were similar and supported the Forget Report. Nevertheless the Government rejected recommendations which were unanimous even among members of its own Party.

We regret the lack of commitment of the Government to reform the unemployment insurance system. We must also put on record again our complete—and I have to use the word—disgust with the Government in the way it tried to solve the problem of early retirement. About two years ago it cut unemployment insurance benefits for those people who were forced to take early retirement. After a year of pressure, of lobbying, of marches on Parliament Hill by veterans and by retired members of the RCMP, it decided to rectify its mistake, but only in part. The Government returned the benefits it cut from some of those people, but not all of them, leaving a great sense of injustice in Canada that will remain because of the way the Government handled this matter.

We support this Bill but we regret the Government's lack of commitment to the reform of the unemployment insurance system. We also regret the disgraceful way in which the Government handled the cuts in unemployment insurance for early retirees, only restoring benefits to part of that group of people. I believe the Government's record with respect to unemployment insurance is part of the reason it is still at 25 per cent in the polls in Canada.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments? Debate.

Mr. George Baker (Gander—Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, I have just a few words to say about this Bill. The Bill says that during a period up until next year, the number of weeks that an insured person has to wait—I presume that is a person wanting to draw unemployment insurance, other than a new entrant or re-entrant to the labour force—shall be such and such. I just want to put on the record that the law itself is discriminatory. Can you imagine, Mr. Speaker, how silly it sounds to someone trying to get unemployment insurance when the law passed by the Parliament of Canada says, you can collect unemployment insurance but it depends upon whether you are an new entrant or a re-entrant or whatever? It does not matter where one worked, what one did or how long one worked; it now depends on who one is. I notice that 90 per cent of re-entrants are women, and that no one over the years has

really zeroed in on that particular aspect, not that I am overly concerned about it.

A re-entrant would need 20 weeks on the Gaspé Coast, the Great Northern Peninsula of Newfoundland or some rural area. That would be a young man or woman who has managed perhaps in a poor area just to get as much work as everyone else. They do not qualify for unemployment insurance. Why? Because they are categorized as a new entrant. The law says they did not collect unemployment insurance before so they have to have double the number of weeks that someone who collected unemployment insurance before has to have. How silly can it get? How silly and discriminatory can the law be?

If one missed a year of work—and perhaps the industry was down in the area for last year—and wants to qualify, one has to work double the period one worked two years ago. How silly the law is. How silly the people of Canada must think are the Parliament of Canada, governments and politicians in general.

We are not talking about people who make a lot of money. What is the maximum UI benefits today? Certainly one would not be making \$300 a week. You would not be bringing in any great sum of money. Yet we make these laws. One would have to say that the people who devised the Unemployment Insurance Act over the years had to be a group of people who were trying to complicate the system. Why do we not just give people unemployment insurance benefits when they have been working and have lost their jobs?

For the last two months I imagine most Members of Parliament have been inundated with cases, as I have been, of people who have returned to school. Perhaps it is night school, afternoon school or morning school; perhaps it is a trade school or to a university doing part-time courses. Those people returned to school because they were perhaps out of work and were drawing unemployment insurance only to discover that they are not allowed to go to school if they are drawing unemployment insurance. They have to sit home next to the phone and if they move away from the phone they can be cut off. They cannot go looking for work. They cannot take a course in the afternoon from one o'clock to three o'clock because the Act says that in that case they are not available for work.

I just simply wanted to put that on the record. How silly, how very silly the Unemployment Insurance Act is. It has always been there. We have always tried to figure out ways to track people down and stick them. The Unemployment Insurance Commission now has employees whose job description is to try to figure out how many people they are going to cut off today. It is bad enough to tell someone who has just lost his or her job that they have a two week waiting period. What are they supposed to live on? One other option is to go down to the welfare office, but if they do that they have to sign a sheet of paper saying that it can be taken out of their unemployment insurance when they receive it. If they do not do that they can be charged under the Welfare Act of any provincial Government. We deal with these cases daily.