

Unemployment Insurance Act

In the case of smaller businesses it is much more difficult. In many cases they are simply not able to increase their prices, and what this means is that smaller businesses are going bankrupt to a much greater degree than they have been for many years.

In 1978 the Liberal party continued this policy of shifting the costs of the burden of unemployment to the unemployed and to working people by making workers pay the second phase, the labour extended benefits. What do we have today? What do we see before us in this apparently innocuous two-page bill? We see an admission on the part of this government that it has no responsibility. We see a declaration that this government refuses to accept responsibility for levels of unemployment at any level—not 4 per cent, not 6 per cent, and not 8 per cent.

What this government is telling working people, the poor, women and young people, is that they have to pay the costs of the government's bankrupt economic policies. As the hon. member for Lincoln said, this system was on trial in 1971. Well, as we have seen, the system has failed to meet the needs of Canadians, to the point that now the government is rolling over telling working people that it has no responsibility for unemployment.

The real reason for this bill was stated by the minister in a few words, namely, that in the spirit of restraint it is to save some \$378 million. While this may save \$378 million from the general revenues of Canada—perhaps to enable us to buy one or two more fighter aircraft—what is happening is that working Canadians are being forced through increases in their premiums to pick up the difference.

Mr. Young: Hidden taxes.

Mr. Robinson (Burnaby): It is a hidden form of taxation, as the hon. member for Beaches (Mr. Young) rightly points out.

The extent of unemployment is very great indeed, even in the official figures. The most recent figures are from May of this year, and they show that in Canada there were an estimated 904,000 Canadians out of work. That is the official figure.

Some 431,000 Canadians between the ages of 15 and 24, and some 145,000 Canadians over 45 years of age, want to work but cannot find jobs. Of these 904,000 workers there were some 399,000 women, including 186,000 under the age of 24 years. The unemployment rate for the whole of Canada was some 7.8 per cent by official figures, 13.9 per cent for those between 15 and 24. The rate for those between 20 and 24—and in many cases these are students who are entering the labour force for the first time and cannot find work—was 12.9 per cent and, as we know, these students are entering the labour force for the first time and in many cases are not eligible for unemployment insurance. They are caught in that vicious trap. They have been to school. They have gone out to the work force to try to find work. They have been unable to do so, and they have had to suffer the degradation of being forced to go down and get into the welfare lines.

What kind of treatment is it to say to young people, after their having gone through a number of years of training, which in many cases has involved considerable sacrifice on the part of parents or relatives in putting these students through school, "Sorry about that, boys and girls, but this economic system has no place for you"? We tell them that the appropriate place for them is on the welfare rolls, and for how long one can only speculate.

One million plus Canadians are out of work, but I believe it is important that we not forget that there is a very strong personal dimension in these figures. I know that all members of Parliament have seen many cases in their own constituency offices. Every time I go back to my riding of Burnaby, I find that people telephone my constituency office. We hear from women, young people, and heads of households. We hear from the man who has just been told that he is being laid off after 20 years of work.

We must also be aware of the personal sacrifice and the personal toll taken as a result of unemployment. We have heard the eloquent words of Gerry Yetman of the province of Nova Scotia, for example. He is the leader of the Nova Scotia Federation of Labour, and at a recent federation convention he read out the suicide note left by a man in his fifties who had been laid off from his job and who had searched desperately for some alternate employment. He had eight children, and one day those children came home and found a note left on the kitchen table by their father, who said he felt he was a burden, he felt humiliated and that he could no longer go on because he could not find a job.

How many other tragedies are there? How many other personal tolls are there as a result of the failure of Liberal economic policy over the years to deal with this tragedy of unemployment, which surely must rank number one in this country? Inflation is a serious problem, of course, but if we are to identify above all one symptom of the economic crisis which members of the Liberal party, followed by members of the Conservative party, have foisted upon the people of Canada, that problem must surely be the fact that over a million Canadians who want to work cannot find jobs.

We see the crippling effects of unemployment on the morale of the individual, the effects of sending out letters day after day to various employers, of attempting to answer ads in the newspaper and of the letters which come back, those anonymous letters sometimes addressed politely "To whom it may concern". Occasionally there will be a letter addressed to whomever has applied for a job, informing him that, "Thank you very much, but your services are not required". These letters come in day in and day out. What effect does this have on the morale of a man or woman who has been working for many years and who has a family to support but whose unemployment insurance has run out? What effect does this have on the morale of the family of that individual as well? Too many of these people have given up all hope of finding work, and the blame for that rests squarely on a succession of Liberal and Conservative governments, both federally and provincially.