

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

hardships for unemployed Canadians than they have experienced already. We must support this Bill. We do not want to delay it, we will expedite it.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie):** Mr. Speaker, I have very little time to consider a Bill that is very important indeed. This Bill concerns workers in Canada's remote areas in all our provinces, and it also concerns fishermen in the Maritimes. The purpose of this Bill is to provide an extension for existing legislation introduced by the previous Liberal Government, under which workers in remote areas, where unemployment rates are higher, do not require as many weeks of insurable employment to be eligible for unemployment insurance as workers in larger urban centres where it is easier to find a job. For instance, in Montreal it takes about twenty weeks of insurable employment to be entitled to full unemployment insurance benefits during a certain period. Under the existing legislation, fishermen, for instance, in remote areas like the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands, were entitled to unemployment insurance after ten or twelve weeks of employment. Considering that job creation in these areas is practically impossible, these people would otherwise have had to go on welfare. In some cases, because the fisherman's spouse had an income or because the family had property, certain assets and a boat, they were not eligible for welfare benefits. So these people would have been doomed to poverty.

At the time, the Liberal Government introduced this amendment to cover a fairly long period until such time as thorough review of the unemployment insurance system had been made.

I understand, and I think it is unfortunate, that the NDP Members disagree with the principle. They would prefer to see everyone treated the same. They do not agree that special measures should be taken to help fishermen and people working in remote areas, but I think that today, at least, they do agree on this Bill. However, we should be concerned about the fact that the Government is asking for a one-year extension only. In 1985 and last year, it was understandable the Government should ask for a one-year extension because it had set up a commission of inquiry to review the whole unemployment insurance system. The House will remember the Forget Commission and several task forces set up by the Department of Employment and Immigration. There was also the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration. Nearly \$8 million was spent in the course of making recommendations to the Government for a genuine reform of the unemployment insurance system. Unfortunately, everybody remembers that the Government has wasted this money and tossed in the waste basket the recommendations to amend the Unemployment Insurance legislation, including those, quite valid in fact, presented by the Committee on Employment and Immigration, an all party committee.

Mr. Speaker, it was understandable for the Government to seek a one-year extension, because everybody expected a

thorough reform and that the amendment before us would become a permanent part of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

Today, however, the Government comes up with a one-year extension, when it is about to sign a free trade agreement with the United States, and when we know that the Americans seem to consider the payment of unemployment insurance benefits in remote areas of the country as a sort of disguised subsidy—

Why—and that is the question I should like the Minister of Employment and Immigration to answer, and that is one of the amendments we are going to put forward in committee—did he not propose an amendment which would be good for four, five or ten years? If this measure is good for one year, it should be good for the year after. Why, at the very last minute just before the holiday season, did he propose an extension? In view of the fact that the Government has decided not to carry out a global reform of the unemployment insurance scheme, why did the Government not propose amendments to extend for the next ten years this legislation which is important for men and women working in remote areas?

Is it because the Canadian Government expects its American counterpart, following the signature of the free trade agreement, to say: Listen, this is the way competition works, these are unfair subsidies, this unemployment insurance scheme has to go. Automatically, the Government will not table this amendment next year and say to his American friends: Mission accomplished, gentlemen. Mr. Mulroney will tell Mr. Reagan: Yes, I am at your service. Canada's lackey will help you. We will not table again this amendment and fishermen will be penalized because of their incomes from unemployment insurance benefits, and all the other conditions will be affected by it.

Mr. Speaker, I know that I shall speak tomorrow or the next day, as I will have some time left, but I would like to point out that, when we speak about reducing wasteful spending, this Government also cut back the unemployment benefits of older workers. After a fight of 17 months, 46,000 of these workers received their benefits. Unfortunately, the Conservative Members took no part in this fight. In all Canada, 46,000 workers received an average of 10,000. There was 18,000 in Western Canada. These older workers got their money thanks to their own persistence and also thanks to the Liberal Official Opposition. However, some people are still being penalized.

The Government still discriminates against older workers. There are still 9,000 older workers in Western Canada who did not get their money, 3,000 in the Atlantic provinces, 13,000 in Ontario and 15,000 in Quebec, for a total of 42,000 throughout Canada. In addition, 2,000 older workers are in what is called the grey zone having taken an early retirement under the existing legislation before January 5, 1986. The Government then required these people to claim unemployment insurance benefits. Imagine, Mr. Speaker, what happens when