

Section 38 has demonstrated its value as a way of helping the evolution of unemployment insurance towards that concept of employment insurance.

• (1120)

Equally, Mr. Speaker, I think Members also recognize the important contribution the work-sharing program has made over the past year and a half. Under Section 37 we have now signed over 13,000 work-sharing agreements with Canadian firms and their workers. Those agreements have provided income and job security for over 250,000 Canadian workers. The work-sharing program is still being used by a large number of Canadian workers and their firms on a voluntary basis. That is unquestionably a clear demonstration of the willingness of Canadian workers, unions, employers and the federal Government to co-operate in a partnership to help keep people on the job. Recent evaluations we undertook have demonstrated that 90 per cent of Canadian workers in the program support it and were prepared to pay higher unemployment insurance premiums to see it continue. I think that is clear proof of its value during these difficult times.

As Members know, I recently announced the Government's approval of taking work sharing one step further to use it as a tool for preventing lay-offs and to provide an orderly transition for workers faced with technological change and industrial dislocation. Thus rather than have workers laid off and going through a kind of cold turkey on the street when a firm has to change to new equipment or new technology, we can now use this program over a 50-week period to enable management and workers to design a system for retraining, proper counselling and guidance so that workers are not sent onto the street and have in fact the opportunity to adapt to industrial change. I hope Members of Parliament will help us in the development of these pilot projects so that we can use this to face what is unquestionably one of the most serious concerns among Canadians—how to protect their job. Using this program under the UI system provides one of those basic and essential ingredients to provide that job security.

I can see a clear demonstration of this in my own Province, Mr. Speaker. In Thompson, Manitoba we had a major lay-off of over 2,000 workers at Inco. At the inception of the lay-off a Section 38 program was brought into play where something like 500 to 700 of those workers were employed for over two or three months doing major work in helping to expand the hospital system, provide major revisions in the physical structures of the schools, helping to rebuild the union centre and do a number of major light construction jobs around the town of Thompson. We were then able to introduce a work-sharing program into the Inco mine which has now enabled 2,000 workers to go back to work. So with that one firm in that one town in my Province, the new applications of unemployment insurance regulations have demonstrated their value. I would ask any Member who has any doubt whatsoever to go to Thompson and ask those workers and their United Steel Workers Local whether they think this particular direction we are moving in is valuable? I know what kind of answer they

will get because they have told me personally how much they support this kind of movement.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we recognize there have been many examples over the past several months where regulations under the Unemployment Insurance Act sometimes appear to be unbending and too rigid. I want to tell Members of the House this morning that the CEIC has implemented a system of quality control to ensure that claimants are treated with fairness under an appeal procedure within the system. In addition, we have undertaken to refer a number of the regulatory requirements under the Act to a legal expert from Laval University to do a major review for us on some of the regulations themselves and how they can be applied with greater fairness and equity. I hope to be able to report back to Parliament in the fall, particularly to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, on the findings in this area and the kind of regulatory changes we will make after the review is completed.

Those are the kind of changes we are making without having to go through statutory amendments. At the same time, we do face some very essential and necessary changes to the Act due to circumstances somewhat beyond our control but nonetheless necessary. Action is required to put in place something that we have talked about for too long but have not taken acted on, that is, to introduce more equity into the payment of maternity benefits and to extend those benefits to the parents of adopted children.

• (1125)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Speaker, we need your support to get these changes through the House. Otherwise, the provisions will expire on June 4. One hundred thousand Canadians might lose their benefits next year. These workers, who live in areas with high unemployment, may have accumulated less than fourteen weeks of employment and will no longer be entitled to unemployment insurance benefits.

[*English*]

Obviously, the question of entrance requirements is central to the whole operation of the unemployment insurance system. As we all know, on June 4 of this year we face a sunset clause which would require the entrance requirements under the Unemployment Insurance Act to be a standard 14 weeks right across Canada. That would mean that many Canadians who are in areas of particularly high unemployment would not have the eligibility for a ten-week requirement.

Therefore, one of the major amendments that we are introducing today under second reading is to restore, for a two-year period, the ten-week to 14-week variable entrance requirement to ensure that Canadians in regions of high unemployment will still be able to have the kind of special requirements under the Bill which would be allowed to them under the ten-week rule. I think this would recommend itself to all Members of the House without much debate. It affects close to 100,000 Canadians. While it would have a saving of