

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

• (2310)

[*Translation*]

The second reason this Government brought forward this Bill has unfortunately become too clear following its election. Undeniably, Bill C-21 is a first step leading to a plan for the giants of the business world to move to free trade. By withdrawing from the unemployment insurance program, the Canadian Government is doing what the American Government wants, because the U.S. Government will not be able to take reprisals against us on the pretext that Canada uses unemployment insurance to subsidize its workers.

[*English*]

The Bill will be even more damaging when considering it in the light of free trade. By pulling out of UI, the Government of Canada has asked Canadian workers and employers to fill the \$3 billion void caused by its absence.

This will result in either a higher unemployment rate, caused by employers reluctant to pay this hidden payroll tax, or it will lead to a powerful lobbying effort on the part of big business to be exempt from paying the unemployment insurance premiums because of their need to have a balanced playing field with their United States counterparts.

While corporations get larger and more profitable, average Canadians have to pay the price in terms of wages and social insurance. Knowing how close big business is with the Conservative Party, one can only wonder how long it will be before unemployed Canadian workers will be asked to foot the entire bill for unemployment insurance.

The last reason the Government has decided to implement this new unemployment insurance policy is its misguided Conservative ideology. Unfortunately, the majority of the Members opposite believe that a caring and compassionate social welfare system will lead to a greater degree of laziness. This archaic view of individuals who must take advantage of various social schemes is reprehensible in a country like Canada.

The majority of Canadians are tired of listening to the rantings of the dinosaur club and its talk of welfare bums when the actual number of people abusing the system is far below levels articulated by Members of the Government.

The statistics speak for themselves. The number of individuals caught cheating on the unemployment insurance was 5,507 out of 2.4 million Canadians who use the UI system. This represents only 0.2 per cent of the total number of Canadians who use the system. This is to edify the Hon. Member for South Shore.

Only 6,215 people have refused jobs found for them through UI. This represents only 0.25 per cent. Both these categories together represent less than half a percentage point of all individuals using the system. Despite this fact, the Conservative Government is still intent on characterizing by its statement that abuse is rampant in the system all people dependent on government assistance as ungrateful welfare bums.

That ideological bend is a major force behind this Government's withdrawal from unemployment insurance and a strong motivator for the severity of this Budget. This Government should learn from international examples that progressive unemployment insurance schemes go hand in hand with low unemployment rates. Social democratic countries such as Sweden, Austria, and Switzerland have some of the most progressive UI plans in the world and an unemployment rate below 5 per cent.

In fact, the average unemployment rate in Canada during the 15 years of Liberal Government preceding the global recession was 5.6 per cent. That puts into real perspective the fact that the Conservatives have not been able to bring the unemployment rate below 7 per cent once in the five years they have been in power. So much for the Government's record. The only place in Canada where full employment exists is in the overheated economy of Metropolitan Toronto.

It seems that this Government would be more than pleased if people from Corner Brook and Sydney moved to Halifax. They would be more than pleased if people from the Gaspé and the Saguenay moved to Montreal. The provisions of this Bill will make staying in the economically depressed regions of the country even more difficult.

The Minister of Employment and Immigration has stated that Bill C-21 still maintains the regional sensitivities to allow people from remote areas of Canada to stay in their homes. This is simple nonsense. If we look at the figures, we can see that in every region of the country the requirements for eligibility have increased. Also, the Tory Government seems to be sending an odd signal. In previous years, in an area of low unemployment, one needed 14 weeks to qualify for benefits. Now 14 weeks will qualify one only in regions where the unemployment