

was a well thought-out and valid plan, why was it not introduced originally? According to the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), he has always been telling the government to look for a regional approach. Suddenly, the government came into the committee hot and sweaty, and the minister made his big announcement. He rushed to the cameras saying that the government had discovered regional disparities and that it was implementing a program to take into account the differences in the regions.

Mr. Alexander: Don't take my name in vain.

Mr. Rodriguez: I am not taking the name of the hon. member for Hamilton West in vain. If I did, I would expect thunder to clap and lightning to strike around this building, and I would be struck.

Mr. Paproski: Stick to your script, Rodriguez.

Mr. Rodriguez: The hon. member tells me to stick to my script. Well, what has the government done? It now says there will be 54 regions. In each region the unemployment rate, which is defined in this amendment, will determine the number of weeks a claimant will collect benefits.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Rodriguez: How stupid. The hon. member is flapping his wings. He thinks that is great stuff.

Mr. Nystrom: He was flapping his flippers.

Mr. Rodriguez: Well, throw him a fish. Let me inform the minister and his nabobs, because obviously they did not think this thing through, that this is a very unbalanced program. It was just dashed together. The riding of Nickel Belt is about 150 miles north to south, and another 200 miles—

Mr. Friesen: We will take it next time.

Mr. Rodriguez: The Tories are deader than a dodo in Nickel Belt. Nickel Belt comes into region No. 21, but region No. 21 stretches all the way to Wawa. It includes Blind River, all of Nickel Belt and it goes over to Mattawa. The community of Killarney is 52 miles from the large industrial centre, Sudbury, where unemployment is low, but at certain times of the year the unemployment rate in Killarney is 60 per cent. However, when we consider the total over-all region, we find that we are brought down to the minimum number of weeks in terms of collecting benefits.

Because of the geographical nature of our country, we find that within regions there are pockets of unemployment which exceed national levels and which far exceed the regional levels which have been set by the minister for the number of weeks a person can collect benefits. I am sorry the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster) is not here with us today. Blind River suffers gravely and seriously because of unemployment. The rate of unemployment in Blind River is easily over 20 per cent. Also, one only has to consider the LIP grants and the Canada Works grants which have floated into that community, to

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realize the seriousness of the problem. The people there have been finagled by the Shouldices of Ontario and of this country. The shysters took every DREE grant and every Ontario Development Corporation grant they could get, and then pulled out and left the people without employment. They will be included in a particular region even though parts of that region may be suffering high unemployment. That is one of the fallacies of the amendments the minister has proposed. His amendments tamper with the present act which was incorporated in 1971.

I want to reiterate what the hon. member for Brant (Mr. Blackburn) has said. We do not support unemployment insurance fund rip-offs. We have always supported a full employment approach in this country. We have always said that there ought to be jobs for those who want to work. Those who are incapable of working because of mental or physical disabilities should have programs which can look after them. The government is responsible for the economic health of the country, but we find that nothing positive or constructive is being done. We are told consistently by this government that we must wait for the cavalry bugles from south of the border before our economy will improve. The government must accept responsibility for the lack of action which has caused high unemployment in this country. Instead, all it does is tamper with the act.

As the hon. member for Brant said, we do not think the length of time a person can collect is carved in stone. We do not think the present period is appropriate. There are very few times that I find myself in agreement with the Canadian Mining Association, given the nature of my riding and our experience with that association. However, the Canadian Mining Association has said this is not the time to be tampering with the Unemployment Insurance Act with respect to the number of weeks of attachment, nor with respect to the length of time a person can collect benefits. That association says the attention of the government ought to be focused on the creation of employment opportunities, and only then should the government make the changes to the act which it thinks are necessary.

The Economic Council of Canada had this to say about the unemployment insurance program:

We believe that most Canadians affected by unemployment are well served by the unemployment insurance system and use it honestly . . . It would of course be possible to try to eliminate abuses by cutting certain categories of claimants or the duration of benefits or by extending the period of work before claimants could become eligible for benefits. But such recommendations could prove harmful to persons most exposed to periodic and genuinely by involuntary unemployment.

● (1220)

What did the bureaucrats at the Unemployment Insurance Commission do then? They waved them all aside, making them disappear with their in-house, outhouse, around the house, back-house studies. That is what they did with their own interviews and cheap counterfeit reports like the one called "Employment Patterns in the Atlantic Provinces." I suppose the information was obtained by telephone in the way benefit control officers obtain information on claimants by