

Unemployment Insurance Act

Second, if it is really a complex and difficult problem fraught with insurmountable obstacles for his department, I would ask the minister to give serious consideration to identifying the whole province with the most favourable provisions in those cases where the province is small. Already major parts of the province are identified, and this would not be a very extensive development.

[Translation]

Mrs. Éva Côté (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of Bill C-3 before us today is to extend the application of the variable entrance requirement for unemployment insurance benefits. So this bill proposes to keep in force until June, 1982, the present requirement under which claimants must have accumulated between ten and 14 weeks of employment to qualify for benefits.

Under the variable entrance requirement, people living in areas where the rate of unemployment is high need a lesser number of weeks of insurable employment to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits than people living in areas with a low rate of unemployment. For example, when the rate of unemployment is 6 per cent or less, claimants need 14 weeks of work. When the rate of unemployment is above 9 per cent, they need only ten weeks of work. So unless Bill C-3 to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act is passed, the variable entrance requirement will become a fixed requirement of 14 weeks as early as December, 1980.

If, on the one hand, the qualification requirements for unemployment insurance benefits must not encourage unstable work patterns and encourage workers to remain unemployed, a fixed entrance requirement of 14 weeks would, on the other hand, have very different effects in the various parts of the country. It would affect a much greater proportion of workers in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces than in the prairies. In addition, under a fixed requirement, re-entrants—people who have drawn unemployment insurance benefits during the year—would need to have between 14 and 20 weeks of employment rather than between ten and 16 to qualify for benefits.

Mr. Speaker, the economic situation in Canada generally is difficult. What about the effects on a territory like the Lower St. Lawrence, the Gaspé Peninsula, Rimouski and Témiscouata where the rate of unemployment generally varies between 15 per cent and 30 per cent? Despite the good will and a real desire to work, our labour force cannot have steady employment. The socio-economic reality in that territory is creating a lot of seasonal jobs that we are trying to turn into permanent jobs through economic development policies but we do not always get the result we are hoping for. Our region is far from the large centres and therefore from the market-places. Moreover, there is already a major movement of the population away from the area because we cannot create enough permanent jobs to keep our workers, especially the young people who join the labour market.

• (1720)

If, in addition to this, we create an even more difficult situation by restricting eligibility for unemployment insurance by considering Canada as a whole as an economic region, again I say that this will be unfair to many Canadians who work at least periodically when they are able to do so, and it is certainly not because our labour force is lazy that our unemployment rates are scandalous. Mr. Speaker, I shall therefore have to vote for Bill C-3, even though a large proportion of the population of Rimouski and Témiscouata still suffers from Bill C-14 passed in 1978. At that time, a poor description of economic zones greatly disadvantaged thousands of workers. It is simply unthinkable to consider the unemployment of a constituency like Rimouski and Témiscouata with the Quebec economic region, and I find it unacceptable that the people of my riding will again be disadvantaged.

Even though Bill C-3 does not solve all my problems, the situation of the people of my constituency would worsen if this bill were not passed. Their already difficult situation would further deteriorate. I therefore hope, Mr. Speaker—and I would like to call on the solidarity and the support of my colleagues—that the workers of Rimouski and Témiscouata will be considered fairly as concerns eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits according to the economic capacity of the region to provide permanent employment.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, I would much prefer that the money of Canadian taxpayers be used to create jobs and to eliminate the social plight of unemployment, but we have to be realistic and recognize that some of our workers do not have the opportunity to find stable employment and that society must try to help them get through this difficult period. I have noted that the minister has stated his intention to publish relatively soon a white paper on the issue of unemployment insurance. I invite all my fellow citizens to welcome this document and to take positive steps so that unemployment insurance, which must be considered a major economic subject, will meet effectively and fairly the needs of the workers temporarily without a job. For my part, Mr. Speaker, I wish to assure the minister of my fullest co-operation, and I would like to remind him once again about the hardships suffered by the people of my constituency when they must be included in an economic area as large as that of Grand Portage, which includes the economic area of Quebec, which is quite dissimilar and cannot be compared to it.

[English]

Mr. Mel Gass (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to participate in this debate regarding Bill C-3, an act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. The question of entitlement to benefits has been rather hazy in the past and I hope this act will move toward clarifying many questions Canadians have regarding unemployment insurance.

First of all I would like the record to show that I consider unemployment insurance as an insurance, not a welfare, pro-