

Unemployment Insurance Act

An hon. Member: Let it go to committee.

Mr. Philbrook: Mr. Speaker—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. The hour for private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair until 8 p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

● (2002)

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT**MEASURE TO AMEND**

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-14, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, and motion No. 1 (Mr. Leggatt).

Mr. Paul McCrossan (York-Scarborough): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, my party feels that people with dependants for income tax purposes should continue to be covered for the two-thirds of earnings for which they are currently insured. Any lower rate will cause hardship. However, we believe that Canadians who do not have dependants have higher proportionate disposable incomes and should be insured for a lower proportion. We feel that 50 per cent of earnings is about the level both to provide adequate protection and not to provide an incentive toward anti-selection. The benefits would be related to need, and the opportunities for abuse of the plan would be dramatically reduced. This would be an intelligent restraint, the restraint of the deft hand of the surgeon.

In its current amendments the government is proposing to penalize all individuals who are unemployed and who repeat without adequate intervening work records in areas of less than 11.5 per cent unemployment. Finally, we know the current Liberal full employment definition for this country. In my opinion this change will almost exclusively affect the legitimately unemployed and may even deter unemployed persons from taking temporary employment to get off claim. Those who control their own unemployment will just work a little longer to ensure that they meet the higher requirements. Those who cannot get work, because the economy is so bad in their areas that work is not available, may be forced onto welfare. We have already heard from three Liberals opposite who also

[Mr. Philbrook.]

feel that this particular provision will cause hardship in their areas.

If we want to go after abusers, let us go after abusers directly. Let us go after people who quit their jobs without just cause. Let us come down on employers who do not state the real reasons for job termination, but for goodness sake, let us not ride on the backs of those who are legitimately unemployed.

● (2012)

In my opinion, the government should not be penalizing repeaters, it should be giving consideration to two different types of amendments with regard to quitters. It should be significantly lengthening the waiting period for people who quit their jobs, such as from six weeks to 12 weeks. Furthermore, it should consider paying a reduced level of benefits to people who quit. Alternatively, it should set some minimum period of work record before quitters are covered for benefits at all.

In summary, the parliament of this country has two obligations in designing an unemployment insurance plan. It should see that the plan is economically sound, and it should see that the plan is socially just. The government, in my opinion, is not reaching toward either of these objectives. It is trying to defuse a potentially embarrassing political situation by convincing the average voter that somehow it is cracking down on abusers, while the reality of the situation is that the crackdown is far harder on the legitimately unemployed. The crackdown, or so-called crackdown, will probably affect five or six times as many legitimately unemployed as abusers. The so-called crackdown is going to have the maximum impact in the areas of least economic advantage in our country, the Atlantic provinces and Quebec.

If my experience in private industry is any gauge, the abuses are most likely to be taking place in central and western Canada, in the middle class and upper middle class income families where the opportunities to cheat for secondary wage earners are largest.

A recent ex-deputy minister of finance has described our current unemployment insurance system as the major impediment to our economic recovery. The current system is causing a breakdown of morals because some people really are better off quitting than working, and they are taking advantage of it. It is causing a tremendous loss of productivity because of the increased rate of job turnover. It is causing large financial deficits, which are a hemorrhage upon the future health of our country. The plan is crying out for revision, crying out for intelligent revision, not the hamhanded, misguided efforts that we see in the government's proposals.

With a properly redesigned unemployment insurance system, we could use the savings to create the jobs Canadians want, to eliminate the unconscionable regional disparities this government has developed. We need to use our wits to pay people to work, rather than not to work.

The Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) should be ashamed to present these proposals which ride on