

I hope that before completion of the study of the bill, the minister will consider the comments and ideas that hon. members will have expressed and that the government might be able to reverse its stand or still give explanations so convincing that all hon. members, I mean Parliament, will have to accept the bill.

● (1550)

[English]

Mr. Alex Patterson (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, I rise at this time to say a few words in support of the motion introduced by my colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander). I take some exception to the suggestion made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) that only one of these sub-clauses be deleted. It has been mentioned that one sub-clause proposes to bring another category of workers under the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act, and the other proposes to delete a group of individuals from participation in the plan.

I suggest that to bring an additional number of individuals under the provisions of the act at a time when the minister is using the argument of restraint, and to remove some others, is rather paradoxical. When we think of those who are to be brought under the provisions of the act, those who are sponsors of projects under programs conducted by the Government of Canada pursuant to any act of parliament,—some of these programs are LIP, OFY, CYC, and possibly others which may be introduced from time to time—it seems rather strange, at a time when the minister is contemplating disposing of such programs, that he now sees fit to propose that the sponsors of such projects be brought under the provisions of the act.

While these programs have done a great deal of good in many areas and in many respects, they are only palliatives at best. The problem is unemployment. These programs were brought about to provide employment opportunities for those who were unable to obtain employment, and if the government paid more attention to solving the unemployment problem in a long-term fashion rather than by these piecemeal programs, greater credit would accrue to it.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Patterson: In budget debate after budget debate, when the former minister of finance was bringing down budgets, he proclaimed the necessity of solving the unemployment problem and stated that the government was determined to do this. However, like some other promises, particularly with regard to inflation, we find that instead of getting better, the unemployment problem is getting worse, which just shows the complete inadequacy of the plans and proposals of the government to meet this very pressing problem in Canadian society.

Instead of bringing out these piecemeal programs and trying to put sponsors of projects on the UIC rolls, the government should be doing something to solve the overall problem; then we would not be faced with the necessity of doing so. It has been pointed out that these programs are short-term. LIP is an example of one of these. They are short-term programs; those who were engaged for a very short period of time would qualify to take their place on

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the Unemployment Insurance Commission rolls and receive benefit. It seems that when we tie this in with the additional provision of deleting those over age 65, it is cynicism at its worst. I would say in passing that programs such as winter works and winter employment expansion which were used in this country at one time were very effective in many respects, much more effective than even some programs that have been mentioned today.

● (1600)

I should like now to refer to the second proposal included in clause 1, the removal from participation in unemployment insurance of individuals over age 65. In the debates that took place in this House at the earlier stage of the bill, the minister stated that the unemployment insurance plan was not a short-term pension plan. Like a great many Canadians I could take exception to that and say that is just about what it is in many respects—a short-term pension plan. The minister also argued that other provisions had been made for people over 65 years of age, but I say they are still inadequate to meet the needs of our senior citizens. When the Canada Pension Plan was introduced, it was pointed out in the course of debate that it was an extremely poor investment program and that, considering the small returns or the benefits received after 45 or 50 years of service, it was not really worth while. I know improvements have been made to the plan, but I suggest it is still not a very good investment as far as the workers of this country are concerned. If you tie in with that the basic pensions that accrue to senior citizens today, I do not think they would justify the removal of this group of individuals from participation in the unemployment insurance program.

We think of those who would be affected by this measure, those who have made a tremendous contribution to the development and building of this country. I know it is almost trite to say it, but it is a fact that they have made a tremendous contribution. Now we find they are going to be put on the shelf. They can take work, and although they have been paying unemployment insurance for many years, if they are past age 65 they will not be able to receive benefits from the scheme. This is an insult to those individuals in the declining years of their lives who are without adequate resources and are unable to provide for their later years. One of the reasons they are unable to provide is that the government has allowed inflation to eat away their savings to the point that they cannot meet their needs. I think these people deserve better treatment.

I agree with the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre who said that people should not be required to retire at any age. Here we have individuals who have gained a vast store of experience, knowledge and skills that would be of benefit to our society, but we are placing them at a disadvantage in saying they may continue to work but must not expect to participate in the unemployment insurance program. Put the two things together: people are allowed to participate after a brief period of employment, and another group of people have worked for years and years, many never claiming unemployment insurance, and now they will be told they cannot qualify for it.

Mr. Speaker, I have great pleasure in speaking in favour of the motion proposed by the hon. member for Hamilton