

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

Mr. Speaker, I think that this bill requires of lot of improvement before it can be passed, and I trust that if we all decide to make it more acceptable to the underprivileged we can do so. It is with this wish that I would like to conclude my remarks.

[English]

**Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North):** Mr. Speaker, we are debating a bill to tighten up the Unemployment Insurance Act. This bill is made necessary, if it is necessary at all, by the disastrous economic and social policies of this government.

In introducing this bill on November 9 the minister said it was necessary because the government wanted to reduce some of the disincentives to work which are present in the program. The minister said this bill was necessary because the program cost over \$4 billion in the latest fiscal year. If the program cost that amount, it is because in the last half dozen years of Liberal government there has been a steadily increasing number of unemployed and a steadily increasing unemployment rate. To a large extent this was brought about by the fact that the government has been more concerned about the threat of inflation than it has been about unemployment.

● (2052)

At the present time there are over one million people unemployed in the country. At least the last available figure for October, 1978, indicated that there were more than 900,000 people unemployed. That is an increase of approximately 2.5 times what it was ten years ago when the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) took office. It is an indication of the failure of the government to deal with this problem. Although the bulk of unemployment, substantially more than half, occurs in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces, there is relative silence on the part of members of parliament from Quebec. I find that rather interesting. They seem disinterested in the plight of their constituents, particularly the members from eastern Quebec where the rate of unemployment is 15 per cent or more.

In March of this year there were more than 300,000 people unemployed in the province of Quebec; in Ontario, more than 300,000 people; in British Columbia, more than 100,000; in New Brunswick 40,000; in Newfoundland, 35,000; and in Nova Scotia, 42,000. The situation is getting worse rather than better.

The announcement yesterday and today concerning the sharp increase in the cost of oil charged by OPEC countries will result in a further increase in the unemployment rate. The United States is expecting a substantial increase in its rate of unemployment, which will be reflected immediately in an increased rate of unemployment in Canada.

The official unemployment figure in Canada for the month of October was over 900,000 people. Many studies have been conducted in which estimates were made as to the real number of unemployed. The official figure represents only people who are unemployed and actively seeking work. Many researchers have established that the number of people unemployed is

[Mr. Lapointe.]

perhaps 30 per cent to 35 per cent higher than the official figure. The unemployed people who are not included in the official statistics, because they have given up looking for work, are married women and young people living in the slow growth areas such as Newfoundland, New Brunswick, eastern Quebec, northern Ontario, and the interlake area of Manitoba. In those areas there are no opportunities for employment, so people have stopped looking. The general problem of unemployment is serious, yet the problem facing young people is much, much worse. The official youth unemployment figure for many parts of Canada is 2.5 times the number of unemployed, rather than the 8.2 per cent figure for the entire labour force. In March of this year the official figure for youth unemployment was 16.5 per cent. In fact there are substantially more unemployed youths than that.

The government is attempting to hide the extent and the seriousness of unemployment in Canada. It has attempted to limit access to employment information at the regional level because the government realizes the situation is much worse than it has been willing to indicate or the public understands. It has been suggested that many people could be working but they do not want to work. The fact is that there are over 900,000 people unemployed, and there are less than 50,000 job vacancies in the country. This means for every job vacancy there are between 15 and 20 people unemployed. It does not take into account that many of the vacant jobs require skilled workers who cannot be found in the ranks of people seeking employment. That is a problem hon. members should discuss at length with the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen). The minister and his department have spent billions of dollars in manpower training programs which have failed miserably to meet the needs of employers. But that is not a subject for debate this evening.

We require more information than we are receiving if we are to deal with the problem of unemployment. If information became available as to the number of unemployed in various regions, the types of unemployed people, and the types of jobs which should be available and are not available, the government might be embarrassed. The fact that this information might embarrass the government ought not to dissuade us from insisting that Canadians and parliament are entitled to more information rather than less. The fact that this information might cause difficulty and embarrassment on the part of the government should not obscure the fact that the secrecy which the government and the Department of Employment and Immigration are attempting to achieve is not consistent with an open and democratic method of public policy development.

In September the government announced the cancellation of the joint federal-provincial community employment strategy program, even though the employment programs implemented by the government in recent years have always been too little and too late. The reason for the government's failure to meet the needs of people who want jobs can be found in the fact that the government has refused to commit itself to a program of full employment.