

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

● (1610)

Not 20 or 30 minutes ago the minister stood in this House and indicated that he absolutely would not consider what he referred to as a two-tier benefit system. I ask the minister to reconsider for just one moment. If the minister believes what he said in another part of his statement, that in fact this should be an insurance fund, then I suggest to him that one of the common characteristics of insurance of any kind is that premiums relate to the possibility of benefits. If one has a very expensive car, one pays an increased premium, but if that car is wrecked one gets an increased benefit. The same is true of houses and of insurance generally. What we were examining when we were the government was the fact that with the inflation rates which the minister's government has caused in the last decade in Canada there is an increased need for income which does relate to the number of dependants one has, whether we are talking about a wife or a husband and children, or whether we are talking about parents, handicapped nieces or daughters.

If you have a job today and you have a family, you have a unit of some kind which is dependent on the income from that job. When that job disappears and you are unemployed, then it is not just you whose income suffers but it is also the incomes of all those who are supported by you. They suffer as well, and it seems to me that the minister could at least invite some sense of dialogue on whether this fund should have its premium rates and benefit rates based upon income need and upon whether one is supporting several people or supporting oneself. I have children of my own. They are young adults, really. They are out working in the work force. The cost of living for them is not as great as it would be if they were out of our home and living on their own. It is true also that their income is not as great, and it seems to me that unemployment insurance for them could involve a lower premium and a lower benefit.

A family man with eight or ten people to support should be able to pay a higher premium and receive a higher benefit. To deny that basic principle is to suggest that the minister is not telling us the truth when he tells us that he believes in an insurance fund. That is all right too, but I wish we could have it clear as we engage in his task force and in this dialogue.

I would like to suggest three or four other things, and then I will pass the podium on to other members of this House. I think it is time we examined the variable entrance requirement. The extension the minister has asked for today will take us through to June of 1982. That gives us sufficient time to look at the wisdom of the variable entrance requirement. In the constitutional debate there are many members of this House who have decried the fact that provincial governments are setting up barriers to employment. They are making provincial policies which give preference to buying from provincial firms. They are making the mobility of people difficult, and I suggest that the variable entrance requirement utilizes the same kind of mentality. Yes, today it has a useful and needed social purpose, but it in itself is a barrier to labour mobility. If there are two or three fundamental principles on which this nation should be based, I would certainly think that

the federal government should take a very solid leadership role in making it possible for goods, services and manpower to move freely from coast to coast and from north to south. If we are one nation, surely that must be one of the principles upon which this nation is based, and in that context the variable entrance requirement is a clause in a piece of legislation which bears examination, and not too long from now.

I was interested in the fact that the minister has moved, by regulation, to change the picture of our unemployment insurance fund in the direction of inclusion of more part-time workers. I am disappointed that the minister did not see fit to make a statement at three o'clock this afternoon about that significant change and thus open the floor to at least a brief question period in which we could have discovered some of the details of that and have had a more adequate chance to respond to that provision. It seems to me to leave several questions hanging. The minister might choose to put out a press statement or in some other way to communicate and answer questions about that part-time provision. However, can an employee, who will now be eligible if he works 15 hours a week rather than 20, work ten hours for one firm and five for another, or are those 15 all to be spent working for one firm? That is one question. After the minister's announcement this afternoon Canadians out there will be confused.

In his statement the minister just told us that he wants to eliminate confusion. Perhaps it is time for the minister or perhaps a speaker from the other side of the House to speak briefly, but it is time to address that question. Will that apply to a single employer or can multiple employers be involved?

The minister threw some numbers at us. He said this will amount to a \$100 million expenditure in the next fiscal year, and he anticipates that \$75 million of that will come out of the fund itself and \$25 million will have to be contributed by government. Where did those numbers come from? Where are the increased benefits? It is possible that the fund may grow by \$150 million and the benefits by \$75 million, in which case the minister is very cleverly increasing the funding and doing so by riding on the backs of part-time workers and women in this nation whom he so clearly indicates so often he desires to help and protect. We need an answer to that kind of question before we can decide whether the minister has invented a new way of ripping off the women of the world or benefiting the women of the world. In the absence of that data we on this side of the House cannot tell.

If the minister has made this decision to include part-time workers in this way, I ask again whether he will make the data on which he based that decision available to hon. members on this side of the House so that we can see it and draw our own conclusions.

I would like to move on to the last two or three items. In his statement on employment creation and in the background paper the minister has given us some indication that unemployment insurance funds are being experimented with on a very small scale in different parts of the country. Again I would like to see the data that those experiments are producing, but I would also like the minister to include clearly in his