

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

work longer in order to qualify for unemployment insurance but in areas with high levels of unemployment people could qualify in a shorter period of time.

I wanted to take note of that because it is fascinating to see how differently the Liberal Party acts when in opposition compared to when in Government. These days Canadians are demanding more and more consistency from their political Parties. They would like to see the promises implemented.

What does this Bill tell us about the Government? Since the variable entrance requirement is being extended for only one year it can be described as a crumb from the table of the rich, a sop to the unemployed and poor. The Government is saying it will give just enough to keep you quiet. It is not going to do anything to reform the system and make it more adequate, it is just going to extend this sop. The Government seeks to maintain the *status quo*. Of course, it is Conservative philosophy to maintain the *status quo*, not to bring about activist Government which will tackle difficult problems and bring about real solutions so that we can build a more humane society. It is simply to hold back the flood and give a little so it can say it has done something.

That is not good enough. We have significant levels of unemployment right across the nation. It is about 8 per cent these days, which does not sound like a heck of a lot because it has been much higher. However, there are other countries that have found ways of providing employment for a much larger percentage of their population. For example, unemployment in Sweden is about 2 per cent. The same for Norway.

Why have Canadian Governments failed to meet the challenge of providing employment for all its people? In short, it is simply because the Government wants to maintain the *status quo*. It is not willing to ask the kind of questions about its policies and the economic system which need to be asked in order to provide the solutions which would lead to full employment.

Full employment is significant because as unemployment has risen, so has poverty. We have had the spectre of the homeless brought to us on our television screens. We have had much more visible evidence of hunger in our society. We are also reminded on a regular basis that fully one-fifth of our population is functionally illiterate. They do not have the basic reading and writing skills required to hold down a good job in a modern society.

These are significant problems, yet the Government simply says it will extend the variable entrance requirement for one more year. It is a symbolic move and completely inadequate. It reflects a failure to recognize that unemployment, poverty, hunger, and a lack of housing is a serious crisis today.

I want to remind people that over the last five or 10 years we have seen a new political philosophy. It is getting a little ragged around the edges but it has dominated political discourse. What is that? It is because of neo-conservatism or the re-emergence of the attitude that the *status quo* is good

enough. It is resistance to social change. It is the absence of concern about social programs and an unwillingness to take action. That philosophy is significant because it reflects itself in public policy, or a lack of public policy.

I also want to remind Canadians that this is very much the attitude expressed by R. B. Bennett in the depression days. This is the attitude expressed by Herbert Hoover, President of the United States, when the depression began. From that depression, in which the vast majority of citizens were brought to their knees, emerged a new political leadership which was able to give hope to people by using the power they had to tackle the problems people were facing, particularly the problem of unemployment. I am thinking now of J. S. Woodsworth, Tommy Douglas, and Franklin Roosevelt in the U.S. These leaders said that when we face problems as a nation we must take action. By the time Franklin Roosevelt delivered his second inaugural address he had taken significant action, had renewed people's hope, and had begun experimenting with solutions to solve problems. However, he said at that time that one-third of the nation remained ill-housed, ill-clothed, and ill-fed. That was half a century ago and the statement is still true today.

• (1240)

It is time for us to pick up the torch from Roosevelt, J. S. Woodsworth and Tommy Douglas and renew a commitment to activist government, a commitment to fulfilling the basic human needs of ordinary Canadians. Although official statistics say that we have 8 per cent unemployment in this country, there is close to 50 per cent unemployment in Newfoundland and 80 to 90 per cent unemployment on Indian reserves. When we imagine the human devastation of living in a community with 80 or 90 per cent unemployment, we must realize that it is time to act and renew our commitments.

I estimate that the unemployment rate in my riding of Winnipeg North Centre is close to 30 per cent. That is a conservative estimate made on the basis of a survey of the parents of school children. It was only teachers who had the courage to try to find out the actual level of unemployment in the community. The teachers wanted to know why the kids come to school hungry and why they have to move three or four times a year due to inadequate housing as a result of low incomes. These parents do not have sufficient employment to provide for the needs of their children in a modern, industrial society.

It is time for us to pick up the torch and renew our commitment to bring about social change which will allow us to fulfill basic human needs. Only when the basic human needs for food, clothing, and shelter are met can people begin to fulfill their potential. Government and political leadership must be about giving people the opportunity to fulfill their human potential and giving society an opportunity to develop a greater sense of community.