

associated with the Government's management of this fishery. We have a crisis in the fishery and we can expect massive layoffs in this industry. They have already begun.

How does the UI program play in those communities? First, fish plant workers are going to face substantially higher entrance requirements and reduced benefits. However, self-employed fishermen will be treated the same way. They are not affected. What we have are two classes of unemployed, the fish plant workers and the self-employed fishermen.

Mr. Reid: Where is the change?

Mr. Leblanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Over the years there has been substantial objection to providing benefits to self-employed fishermen and self-employed individuals generally. What can we expect from this Government? Are we going to expect that the other self-employed workers like small businessmen, truckers and farmers will now receive unemployment insurance benefits? No.

Mr. Reid: Would you take it away from the fishermen?

Mr. Leblanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): That is what we expect that you will do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. There are still 25 minutes to go and there is a full moon outside. Let us enjoy ourselves. The Hon. Member for Cape Breton Highlands—Canso.

Mr. Leblanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): The last point I would like to make has to do with older workers. The proposed changes will allow workers beyond 65 years of age to contribute to and to draw UI benefits. Several speakers opposite have made mention of this provision as if it was something that came out of the goodness of the Government's heart. However, I want to remind Hon. Members that this is really a very tardy response on the part of the Government to the parliamentary task force report on equality entitled Equality for All. It called for this part of the UI program to be changed in order to bring it into line with the Charter of Rights. Therefore, the Government has taken four years to implement that report.

Unemployment Insurance Act

I would just like to say a bit about UI for older workers in general. As we all know, Canada faces an aging workforce. At the same time we have a country where we will face major adjustments which are going to impact and cause layoffs among many of our older workers. We all know that older workers have a more difficult transition when they have become unemployed than the younger workers.

The Minister's statistics on this, I am sure, will bear this point out. However, the UI protection for someone who has been laid off at 45 or 55 is the same as for someone who has only been employed for 20 weeks. Someone who has worked for 20 years and becomes laid off does not receive any more protection than someone who has only worked for 20 weeks. I ask the question: Is this fair?

I suggest that dealing effectively with this aspect of the program would be a start toward developing a more comprehensive and humane package of changes. It might be a legislative package that would be taken seriously. Instead the Minister has offered us a Bill that gives us the worst of all possible worlds, a major reduction in UI protection for everybody and no improvement in the structure of the program. The changes do not follow from any thought of the role that the UI program should play in Canada's social safety net. What it is is a jerry-built contraption designed simply to save this Government money.

If the Minister is unwilling to withdraw this Bill now, my recommendation is that she let it die a mercifully quiet death over the summer. In the meantime, she should go back to the drawing board with her officials. If she cannot come up with a set of changes that address the real needs of Canadian workers in the 1990s, then she should follow her predecessor's lead and leave well enough alone.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (0040)

Mr. Al Horning (Okanagan Centre): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that Hon. Members opposite are motivated by the same desires as are we who sit on the Government side, namely, to build a solid economic and skills foundation in this country that will carry Canada with confidence into the 1990s and beyond. I also understand that