

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

am prepared to include myself—as to what we do with regard to the decade from age 60 to 70. I do not like this measure because it flies in the face of thinking about the rights of people between age 60 and 70. You do not have to go back many decades to the time when those people had little or no rights at all. If they lost their jobs, as they did because of age, they had to depend upon their children or their relatives. They had no social life, no public life, they were left in the back room, they did not have clothes to wear to go out, they did not have car fare—in modern terms that is bus fare.

We have come a long way from that. Now we provide pensions that are more reasonable. We have medicare and free hospitalization for almost everyone, and certainly we have it for our older people. We have pharmacare in a number of provinces, and we have senior citizens' residences which make it possible for many of these people to enjoy accommodation which was unknown to them some years ago. That is fine. I am glad that we have made this progress. But there is a terrible tendency around here to think that because we have done something for older people—done a fair amount, if you will—that is the end of the story and there is nothing more we need to do. By this bill the government is in effect saying, "once you are 65, that is it. Enjoy your pension, enjoy your senior citizens' accommodation, your free hospitalization, medicare and all the rest of it, but forget it so far as being an active member of society or an active member of the work force is concerned."

I think it is wrong to do this. Certainly the whole decade from 60 to 70 should be a time during which persons, ought to have the choice either to work or to retire. What our legislation should do is, not fix things is some hard and fast way but make it possible for persons to exercise that choice. You do not do it if you say to persons at the age of 65, "You are not in the unemployment insurance picture any longer." That is what subclause (2) of clause 1 of the bill does. For these general reasons, and because I think that the whole proposition is unfair, I plead very earnestly that this House give serious consideration to this matter. Other colleagues of mine will have something more to say about subclause (1) and subclause (3) of clause 1 of the bill. An argument can be made against those subclauses such as the one made by the hon. member for Hamilton West, but I think they are far less important, either way, than what is in subclause (2) which cuts persons at the age of 65 off unemployment insurance. In many ways it is completely wrong and unfair.

As I said earlier, I thought the same about cutting them off at the age of 70, but it did not affect as many people and we did not have as many complaints about that action as we are getting now. There were not as many persons who had already built up some kind of entitlement because the law was changed, but there are many of them now who will suffer, when this bill goes through, the loss of entitlements for which they have paid. I think that for the government to bring the cut-off age from 70 down to 65 so soon after it seemed to make the age of 70 the age of retirement by law, is cruel and harsh. Therefore, I urge very strongly that the House support my report stage motion No. 2 which would cut subclause (2) out of clause 1 of the bill and leave Canadians the right to participate in unemployment insurance up to the age of 70.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse):** Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to unduly extend the debate on Bill C-69, on which I understand all hon. members apparently have agreed, so that we can adjourn on December 19 for the Christmas and New Year recess. However, when a few weeks ago I raised in the House the question respecting the government's intention to deny people aged 65 to 70 any benefit entitlement, I was told my question would be answered in the House when this debate on the bill took place. Well, I trust the minister can give me a proper explanation for that amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act. However, having said that, I would remark that I had the occasion yesterday to meet with a number of people in that age bracket; three quarters of them are still gainfully employed and were concerned about the Unemployment Insurance Act amendment to deprive them of their benefit entitlement should they decide to retire.

Mr. Speaker, I can imagine those people remain on the labour market because they need a higher income to meet their commitments, because I guess with their old age income pension and even the supplement, their income would not equal what they get through their present employment. All that is depending on the fact that they have commitments which force them to go on working and the fact that their physical condition enables them to do so. However, if they are granted that benefit entitlement for three weeks only, they also will obviously become unable to contribute to the plan.

I would however like the government to consider very seriously the possibility of proceeding gradually, because it would be unfortunate that a great number of people who would have contributed to the unemployment insurance fund, and never or hardly ever derived any benefit from it, would be bereft in such a radical way of their right when they were in a position to take advantage of the legislation. I think the government would be wise to proceed by stages, so that those people would be informed beforehand of those changes and might prepare for them accordingly.

I would not, Mr. Speaker, elaborate on the statements made earlier by the two hon. members who spoke before me, because they actually pointed at problems which I consider to be extremely serious, and the arguments put forward with respect to the proposed amendments in clause I confirm the fact that those amendments in my opinion are quite appropriate because in this way we want to ask the government to review its position so as not to effect a too sudden change for those people.

Here is the second point it would be time to point out. If we finally decided to lower to 60 the age of retirement and old age security on a voluntary basis, which means that those who want to keep on working could do so, we should not exclude others from the benefits of the legislation which Canada can afford to provide to more people. I think there should be some link between the proposed amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act and the Old Age Security Act. That being said, Mr. Speaker, I must sincerely support the amendments moved by the two hon. members and which appear as motions Nos. 1 and 2, because I think they are justified.