

ments and recommendations. And that is in fact the only thing the committee will be able to do if it postpones reporting the bill until the end of January or in any case after January 6, 1990.

Anyone, any group that has any complaints or grievances to air will be able to do so before the committee. The committee will be able to say what it thinks of these complaints and grievances. It can say that it thinks the government should amend the bill to improve certain benefits. The committee can say that, but it can do no more. And it could do so without causing the inconvenience of not having the bill passed by January 6, and I am referring to the fact that the benefits provided under the bill would not be available to those expecting to receive them as of that date.

From the practical point of view, I think there can be no harm in adopting this resolution. If the Senate refuses, and that is indeed a possibility, the public or claimants will suffer, while if this bill is reported without amendments within the time frame specified in the motion, we will achieve what Senator MacEachen was trying to achieve, and more, when he tabled Bill S-12 yesterday.

● (1730)

[English]

Hon. Allan J. MacEachen (Leader of the Opposition): Honourable senators, I am really not surprised at the insensitivity which has once again been demonstrated by the Conservative Party as it approaches the question of the unemployed in Canada. Today, in the House of Commons, the Conservative majority showed its callous disregard for the unemployed by refusing to accept a solution to the situation which had been employed by the same government all these past years. It can take the responsibility for its own actions in the days and months ahead, as we will on this side take responsibility for ours.

The Conservative government, in refusing to maintain the unemployment insurance entrance requirements at the ten-week level for economically-depressed regions of the country, will penalize the unemployed of Canada.

Let the record show that the Prime Minister and his government had a choice between maintaining the current level of support for the unemployed and adopting a confrontational stand with the Senate of Canada. Mr. Mulroney and his followers chose to let the unemployed fend for themselves.

Yesterday the Senate passed Bill S-12, a piece of legislation designed to ensure that the variable entrance requirements for unemployment insurance now in force are maintained beyond January 6, 1990. The Senate legislation, Bill S-12, now defeated by the Conservatives in the House of Commons, would have ensured that workers losing their jobs in the current economic downturn would still be eligible for existing unemployment insurance benefits.

After January 6, 1990, people will no longer be able to qualify under the uniform 14-week entrance requirement. Under Bill S-12, protection would have been guaranteed until

such time as the Senate had had a chance to complete its work on Bill C-21.

Honourable senators, the Special Committee of the Senate on Bill C-21 is now studying this complex piece of legislation. It is a piece of legislation under which the government itself abdicates its responsibilities to the unemployed by totally withdrawing the financial support which the treasury had hitherto maintained for the unemployment insurance system of Canada. The withdrawal of that financial support is seen by many Canadians as a further effort by the Government of Canada to harmonize its programs with those of the United States.

Some Hon. Senators: Shame!

Senator MacEachen: Believe you me, when Senator Stewart quoted the Minister of Employment yesterday, there was a clear indication that this bill is part of the Conservative agenda, and fits very neatly and easily within the free trade concept.

Senator Perrault: Precisely.

Senator MacEachen: It is about time that these relationships were analyzed and studied in a committee of Parliament. They certainly were not studied in the House of Commons committee.

We now have a proposal embodied in this resolution that Bill C-21 be aborted—that it be torn out from the committee before the committee has had a chance to study it; that it be passed; and then that the committee be allowed to continue its work and make inane and future advisory recommendations, which seems to be the only role that Conservatives can see for the Senate of Canada.

The Conservative Party is out of touch with this country. Its insensitivity with respect to the unemployment insurance bill is appalling. Its insensitivity increases as its popularity declines.

Senator Perrault: Plummets.

● (1740)

Senator MacEachen: Today we are asked to pass a resolution which will terminate the effective role of the committee and end the debate—and then we can all go to sleep and leave the unemployed, who are so badly damaged by this bill, to their own devices. Well, that is not what others in the country are saying.

I do not know what Senator Flynn or his colleagues across the way would do with this batch of letters which I received just on Monday. What answer will we give to them?

Senator Guay: They don't want to give them any answer!

Senator MacEachen: These are citizens of Canada who are asking to be heard and who want to have an impact on the bill. They do not want to participate in an academic exercise. They do not want to participate in a sodality meeting.

Senator Guay: That is right.

Senator MacEachen: They want to have analyzed the impact of this bill on their welfare and on their communities