

### *Unemployment Insurance Act*

highlight alleged abuses of the unemployment insurance program so it could justify a crackdown on UIC benefits.

Here we have the minister admitting that the government orchestrated a deliberate campaign to scapegoat unemployment people.

The campaign was launched after federal officials badly miscalculated unemployment levels, Mackasey said, and it made scapegoats out of thousands of people who were out of work through no fault of their own.

Imagine the former minister admitting this to the House of Commons.

Mackasey, who was responsible for the unemployment insurance program at the time, said his senior civil servants predicted an unemployment rate of 4 per cent when he brought significant changes to the system in the early 1970s.

But when unemployment began to climb well beyond that point, officials scrambled to find ways of amending the Unemployment Insurance Act to shift more of the financial burden of the program to employers and employees.

Referring to his own officials, employees, civil servants of Canada, he said:

"They were not honest enough to admit they had miscalculated and had not anticipated a long period of five, six, seven or eight per cent unemployment in the country," he said.

"Instead, they set out to condition the people by telling them that the changes were needed because of abuse in the system."

These were our young people, sons and daughters of the people sitting in this House. These young people were trying to get work, they were probably only able to get occasional jobs, had to go on unemployment insurance, and became the scapegoat. A national tradition was set up which established for a whole generation of young people that they were shiftless, lazy, no good, and did not want to work. This is a federal department, headed by a minister who knew about this, actually creating this condition in Canada. It is absolutely shocking.

The former minister went on to say:

"It was difficult for me to accept the fact that in preparing the groundwork for their amendments they had to stigmatize hundreds of thousands of people by suggesting they would prefer to draw unemployment insurance rather than work."

That is absolutely shocking. Every Canadian would be ashamed that their government would do this. At least it is now being admitted by the former minister. It is proof that there were cut-offs, injustices, deliberate exploitation and scapegoating of unemployed workers, many of them women and young people, during the period 1972 to 1978 in particular. These people were cut off unemployment insurance benefits wholesale. They had a right to receive these benefits. They were cut off and told that they were lazy and no good, merely to cover up the civil servants' inaccurate prediction, and because of the budget restrictions that the commission was facing.

We have heard of unemployed people who could not find enough money to buy bread for their children, and of policemen, employed as benefit control officers, going into their homes and conducting interviews in a way similar to Gestapo tactics. I am ashamed, Mr. Speaker, and I would hope that most members of this House would be ashamed, to think we ever went through that kind of an era. I stress once again that the people who were most victimized, who could not

find full time work, were women, married women, immigrant women, single women and, as well, many young people. These were the people who were told they had no rights as Canadians to employment and that they had no right to unemployment insurance. They were told they were a bunch of lazy no-gooders. We are not going to allow this kind of crack-down to take place in the future. I say again that the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act by this government must make very sure that this kind of thing does not happen again.

● (1630)

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we say that the bill is not adequate. It should provide for universality. The plan should cover all workers regardless of occupation, whether they are employed by someone else or self-employed, and regardless of income. Entitlement should depend solely on meeting the requirements of a person having worked—not even having worked the number of weeks as now stated. They should have worked enough to have justified the money they put into the scheme, being currently able to work. There should be no special requirements used to discriminate against certain groups. My colleagues have spoken before on this point, but I remind the House again that women who are pregnant have every right to unemployment insurance which they have paid for through their own contribution.

**Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on Bill C-3 which is before the House today for second reading, to discuss some of the principles which lie behind this bill and to explain some of the reasons why we in the New Democratic Party are strongly opposed to those principles.

The bill itself is a deceptively small and simple one. I believe it contains some two pages, and if we look at it quickly we might think, as the minister suggested, that we should just let it go through quickly. But we believe it is important that Canadians be aware of exactly what it is this government is attempting to do with unemployment insurance, and that they be made aware of the fact that this is but one in a series of steps in an attempt to justify the bankruptcy of Liberal economic policy.

If we look at the principle of this particular bill, and if we look back at the original legislation which was passed in 1971 which established the principles upon which our present unemployment insurance system is based, we see the following. We see that in 1971 the hon. member for Lincoln (Mr. Mackasey) was the minister of employment and immigration. He identified certain principles which he believed were important and which, presumably, the Liberal party believed were important, in setting up a fair and equitable system of unemployment insurance. What was that system, Mr. Speaker, and how far have we come since that original system of unemployment insurance was implemented back in the Liberal heyday of 1971?

The original figure was established at 4 per cent. Beyond the level of 4 per cent unemployment the government accepted that it had certain responsibilities; that it was not the responsibility of workers and employers to pay the costs of an econom-