

Employment and Immigration

adjusted and amended. I stated that if in two or three years time we have greater employment or much less unemployment, we could perhaps take a look at this eight week qualifying period. The minister seemed to confuse my statement. It is very clear in *Hansard* what I said, but he seemed to think that it was an agreement that we should have this variance. As I said, nothing could be further from the truth.

We have some very serious problems in this country with regard to employment and unemployment. I have talked about the problems facing young people. I neglected to mention the problems we had with retraining. Although the retraining program was originally conceived with the best of intentions, it was not only very costly but a dismal flop.

Once someone gets into the program, what does he learn? Even if you are a conscientious person in your twenties or thirties, and getting \$50 a week, as well as unemployment insurance and so on, and have a barely liveable wage of around \$100 or \$125 a week, what are you learning? Welding. We have more welders in this country than we know what to do with.

Mr. Rodriguez: Hairdressers.

Mr. Blackburn: I have never been to a hairdresser so I do not know. My wife cuts my hair. That is why it looks the way it does.

Mr. Rodriguez: That is a good way to save money.

Mr. Blackburn: That is right. We in the NDP are very thrifty. The point is that we spend a lot of money retraining people, but after they are retrained, within a few weeks they are back on unemployment insurance because there are no jobs available for them.

I wonder whether retraining means anything in this country. I suspect that it is a slick way of getting people off the unemployment rolls. It makes the government look better from a statistical point of view.

There was another program that flopped. I am afraid that it may come back. I refer to on-the-job training. In some cases it was taken advantage of by the employees and also by the employers. The employers saw a wonderful way of getting a subsidy from the taxpayers for hiring people for a limited time at the lowest possible wages. Is it any wonder that bills like C-27 create an atmosphere of distrust, an atmosphere of bitterness, an atmosphere of class hatred, to use an old expression?

● (2110)

I fear that the feelings which were so prevalent in early twentieth century Europe are now beginning to permeate our society and that legislation from this House and from the government is to blame for a great deal of the growing mistrust and bitterness which are developing between various segments of our society. Unemployed in my constituency will have to wait for three and a half months in order to qualify. Most of the temporary work, certainly in Atlantic Canada, is

[Mr. Blackburn.]

of shorter duration than that; it is hard to get a job which lasts three and a half months; a person is lucky if it lasts for eight weeks.

I say this to the backbenchers opposite: your government is proposing a period of three and a half months in many areas of this country before workers are qualified for unemployment insurance benefit. Unemployment insurance is not welfare, but what happens is that legislation like this turns the Unemployment Insurance Commission into a welfare system.

An hon. Member: And you divide the people.

Mr. Blackburn: As to that subject, the other day in the debate on national unity we heard one of the worst speeches the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) has ever made.

An hon. Member: His annual speech.

Mr. Blackburn: I was interested in the headlines he got in the *Globe and Mail*—not on the front pages but on the editorial page. I do not recall the exact words, but they were something like this—"Prime Minister Makes Speech in House". That is news. I think it is the second speech he has made here in a year. The country has become more and more divided ever since he came to office because of, among other things, bills like C-27 which divide the country in social and economic terms. The Prime Minister's answer is bilingualism for the whole country—we should all speak French and we would become happy people. Mr. Speaker, my wife is a Francophone. I try to speak a little French; it is my fault we do not speak French more often. I am lazy in that respect. But we still get along.

An hon. Member: I hope so.

Mr. Blackburn: We get along, and one of the reasons is that we understand each other. And as Canadians we can understand each other provided we have a reasonable standard of living, a reasonable outlook on life, a reasonable prospect for the future. I am simply suggesting that if we can translate my personal relationship with my wife to the whole country—and I do not want anyone to misunderstand me—we would find that English speaking and French speaking people can get along together without having to speak both official languages.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order. I am not interrupting the hon. member to tell him that his time has expired, but I do wish to suggest that he should keep his remarks within the scope of the bill or the amendment.

Mr. Blackburn: I respect your mild admonition, Mr. Speaker. The point I am trying to make is that this bill, which would drastically change the Unemployment Insurance Act in many respects, is a divisive piece of legislation which is injuring the working people. I have in mind specifically Clauses 29 and 30 and the amendment moved by my hon. friend from Timiskaming that it be given a six months hoist so that we could consider it again and bring in changes which would make it a more humane piece of legislation.