

than I that the procedures, easy exchanges and some of the positive results that took place in the committee, if not without precedent, were at least of a nature not seen all that often within the committee structure. In a number of instances, I found the committee exchanges to be an extremely satisfying experience. For the first time in my two years in this House I felt that a positive and actually perceivable contribution was made. I see the government has left in the bill some of the changes that were made in committee and has not tampered with them. For that I am very thankful.

Having said that, I must address some of the bills' obvious limitations. In many of the minister's answers, both at second reading and in committee, he made it clear that the bill itself is very limited. On January 28 in committee the minister said to the hon. member for Kootenay East-Revelstoke (Mr. Parker) that there was a failure to realize that this bill is not a bill to create jobs but to provide a certain minimum of income to older workers in certain communities. What we have, apart from the amendments to the Canada Labour Code, which is the latter half of the bill, is a bill to provide benefits to some categories of people in some areas of Canada, and those areas of Canada will be chosen strictly at the discretion of the minister within the rather too narrowly defined limits proposed in the bill.

● (1600)

Now, Mr. Speaker, with over one million unemployed at last count, and while we welcome benefits for relatively few of them, especially some older Canadians who may benefit in a concrete way from the provisions in this bill, we are profoundly disturbed at the further balkanization of the unemployment insurance system which will be an inevitable result of this legislation. When we alter a program which was initially universal in its application, simply depending on whether or not someone had been unemployed for a period of time and had contributed to the work force, there is a concern that the divisions this may cause will split region from region, industry from industry, resource areas from manufacturing areas, and the young from the old. Slowly but surely we see in the first half of this bill the dismantling of the national unemployment insurance system and its replacement with a patchwork of individual schemes which, while they are fine in themselves, when taken in isolation, will play off one group of workers against another, and one region of Canada against another.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, and I think I speak for almost all members, we have had enough of that kind of emotion and division without giving more room for those suspicions to grow. As a member from a resource area of western Canada—and many of my caucus colleagues are also from resource areas—I feel those very real attitudes among some of our constituents very strongly and hesitate to see anything else take place which will add to those suspicions and add fuel to the flames. Perhaps “flames” is too strong a word; I think “sparks” is probably a better description at this stage; but we should take them seriously in an attempt to avoid further fanning of them when we can do so without great difficulty.

Labour Adjustment Benefits

These suspicions may arise particularly when the designations will be chosen politically by the minister alone. Of course, we would never suggest that a minister of the Crown would be partisan in his designation of these areas.

An hon. Member: You wouldn't?

Mr. Kristiansen: I would be the last person to suggest that of the new Minister of Labour (Mr. Caccia) who is so conscientious. However, we live in a political system and many people will be very suspicious of a bill containing so many grounds to believe that may be done. It has been said that the designated areas which will fall within the ambit of this bill are, with one sole exception, within a constituency represented by the governing party. Now, maybe that is simply an accident, that the Liberal party represents those areas of the country which have failed economically more than many others. Perhaps there is a message in that somewhere, because I do not know which comes first, the chicken or the egg.

How many people, Mr. Speaker, will actually benefit and where will they be? When this concept first arose approximately a year ago there were five areas considered for designation. It then became eight, and I believe it may now be ten. How many people within even those designated areas are actually going to benefit? We have a submission from both the United Steelworkers and the regional development council from eastern Quebec that in the area of Schefferville, Sept-Îles and Port Cartier only 35 out of over 900 people were actually receiving benefits and would be covered retroactively, I assume, by this legislation. While we realize this is limited, I wonder whether people will realize how limited it is intended to be.

In so far as the age restrictions are concerned, Mr. Speaker, employees must be 54 years old or over in order to receive what is sometimes referred to as the early retirement benefit, with ten years employment. While that is understandable for people who are engaged particularly in heavy manufacturing and resource industries, anyone who is unemployed regardless of whether he or she lives in a designated region or not, it is just as much a crisis for a person in that category to be unemployed, regardless of the nature of his or her work. Setting this restriction in place in the legislation makes us wonder whether or not family allowances and old age pensions are one day going to be decided by area designation. Where does the principle of balkanization stop once you begin to put it into practice? Again, we regret that the unemployment insurance system, which was designed and improved significantly over the years, is now beginning, perhaps for the best of motives, to break down the principle of universality through the balkanization of social and economic services provided by the federal government.

There is reference within this bill, industry by industry, to the designation of an area due to problems arising from import competition. When we think of that, Mr. Speaker, especially with hearings taking place next month in Portland, Oregon, and the possibility that tariffs may be imposed against one of our major industries, the forest industry, why can this bill not