

Unemployment Insurance Act

qualification of persons, 65 years or over; net reduction of costs: \$120 million; persons involved, 170,000. What a beautiful Christmas gift to these 170,000 persons. Really, to draft such a legislation, one has to be totally devoid of any humanitarian sense; this is total nonsense. Estimations of basic cost for the year 1976, taking into account a 7 per cent unemployment rate, these estimates are based on that calculation. The 170,000 persons involved include 63,000 active claimants, aged between 65 and 69 who will no longer receive any benefits. And we seem to rejoice in this.

One would think that the technocrats who drafted this famous legislation and made the calculations submitted in committee greatly rejoice in depriving a group of workers who have contributed all their life to the maintenance of an unemployment insurance measure that was passed by this House, in this Parliament of Canada for all Canadians. And now they are told: You are not entitled to it any more. There will be some old age security legislation to replace this program advantageously. I shall say that it is not entirely true. If we take a look at some particular cases, we can see that many 65-year-old people are still willing and able to work and still have some responsibilities. Those who married late for instance and still have children at school.

Then, they need a relatively high income. Two lumbermen came to see me at home last week. They are brothers one is 66 years old and the other 68. They had finished their work in the bush. They were in cracking form; they had cut many cords of wood during the summer and they asked me what they could do under this legislation and what they could expect from it. I told them: Make an application, the legislation is not passed yet and I hope that the majority of members will study thoroughly this clause and take it off from the bill. Those were the suggestions I made. And then, what surprises me most, is that hon. members have recently received, like ourselves, requests from several old age groups. I have here the recommendations sent by the secretary of l'Association des fonctionnaires à la retraite du Québec Inc. and it was, I am sure, sent to every Liberal and Progressive Conservative member from Quebec. How come those people did not take this seriously? Yet, I think it is clear in the second recommendation that the proposed amendment is unfair and discriminatory toward people aged 65 or more and who do not have a sufficient income to live decently.

During the current period of inflation which this government contributed to create, those people are told: You do not need benefits any more. Manage as best you can with your income, with the procedures you will have to follow to get several things under the old age security legislation. Of course there were some improvements in that respect, but in too many cases it is not enough and it all depends on the commitments those people have. They are still working and they expect to get eventually unemployment benefits as they have contributed to the fund for many years. But this was sent to all members; they are certainly aware of that matter.

From what is recorded in the report, I should be quite surprised if English province residents had not done the same thing. Hon. members of the Liberal party and Mr. Minister, you are in the right position to meet senior

[Mr. Dionne (Kamouraska).]

citizens and inform them that you have adopted legislation to favour them. It is easy to congratulate the aged and wish them the best of health, even when it is necessary to adopt bills which will deprive them of all the benefits of the current legislation. To conclude, I dare hope hon. members will wake up and vote in favour of the proposed amendment to strike out from the unemployment insurance bill this clause which would deprive people 65 years of age of the benefits they should rightfully collect.

[English]

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, when listening to the enthusiastic remarks of my colleague, the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), I wondered what part of the administrative anatomy a nabob was—either a serf in the department or at a higher level—and I had to go to the dictionary to find out. For that reason, I assume other persons who may be reading his remarks will wonder at which level nabobs are to be found, particularly in view of the fact the description has been used so often.

● (1650)

There are before the House in these amendments two ideas which are unrelated in terms of interpretation. One I can wholeheartedly endorse. The other I would support with some reservations. The amendment of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), which would withdraw the restriction in respect of unemployment insurance benefits for persons between age 65 and 70, would seem to be worth considering in light of the remarks of the hon. member for Nickel Belt in terms of the Unemployment Insurance Commission being in a position to sort out these people.

As has been pointed out by other speakers, many of these people must work, for personal reasons. There are no universal, supplementary pension plans in industry throughout the country that would enable a large number of these people to take advantage of any private insurance program. Therefore, what we really are talking about is the social security of the people of our nation which would go into effect at age 65, or in some instances at age 70.

We are not talking about any great sum of money. The amount involved is not what is considered the normal retirement standard of 60 per cent of one's income. Many hardships are placed on a number of people in this category and there is some unfairness, as has been pointed out by previous speakers. Two things bother me about the reduction in the age in respect of unemployment insurance. First, many people are not mentally tuned to retirement at age 65. I think this represents a larger category than those who may of necessity require unemployment insurance beyond age 65, or employment, as the case may be.

I think one problem in this country has been our inability to educate or to train people for retirement. People spend many years in a job which has become very routine, with which they are familiar, where they have friends and where in fact they spend a large part of their waking day. When that situation changes and a person finds himself in his home for 24 hours a day, he finds mental and physical problems develop. I do not think many of our senior citizens have been able to cope with this situation.