

Unemployment Insurance Act

make allowances. If there are lower unemployment insurance rates across the country, make allowances, but remember that when economic regions are being put together and you are coming up with an unemployment rate that one part of that economic region is so harshly treated in the use of that unemployment rate in terms of the variable entrance requirements, and repeaters, the commission certainly should be able to make some commitment to the people of that area, in other words, to give them a definite time period for which they must work and know now instead of in December.

In the month of May the entrance requirements will not be as heavy on the claimant as they would be in the month of December because of the three-month-old statistics. I have already said that the commission seems to be able to come up with changes when it wants to see the changes. Last year, eighteen months ago, we were telling the commission it could not go to 20 hours a week because it would hurt a wide group of Canadians. But we have to change this year. Members of Parliament should be told what the changes should be, namely, the people who are concerned with that element of the people. While we have an unemployment insurance program it seems to me that maybe some people opposite want to slim it down, but while there is an unemployment insurance program in operation, let it be done fairly and equitably, but it is not being done fairly or equitably.

I come back to the point of the 15 hours. It may happen in the small rural communities that a plant will be able to provide ten hours this week and ten hours next week. I ask why not combine that time and give one stamp for the 20 hours instead of putting it back to 15 hours when it is generally the case they cannot get the 15 hours if there is no fish or if the plant is not working? There are several other areas I feel strongly about respecting the way this act has come in and its amendments. We have been told by the minister that there will be a task force for 18 months. I have been told that we are reviewing the unemployment insurance program for the last three years, and yet we have amendment upon amendment and it will continue unless the commission is going to base itself on the facts which the members of Parliament are going to show them. It seems to me that this is a useless process. It is hurting the individual. The people who are more aware of it are the members of Parliament.

I am not certain whether or not the task force will be useful. We will have to wait and see. But I know that during the time period, whether it is 18 months, two years or five years, the application of the Unemployment Insurance Act as it stands today, basing itself on statistic regions, is not one that can be looked at across the board as being a fair application.

If one looks at the economic regions, and takes one area, for instance, South West Nova based in Moncton with Lunenburg, what does it do to Lunenburg? It gives it a higher rate of unemployment. It is a highly industrialized area. It has very few economic problems as such. But there the people will have a lower entrance requirement than if the actual facts were being looked at. You could look at another economic region where there is high unemployment, such as the one that

includes Truro, Nova Scotia. Truro is not affected by the variable entrance requirements. It is not affected for the repeater provisions because its unemployment rate is lumped in with an area that has high unemployment. I am stating that in terms of South West Nova you can start by lumping them together but the actual payout by the commission is going to be higher one way or the other. Therefore you are not really looking, if you want to put it in the minds of the opposition, at who should be receiving the benefits under this program.

When you have a program such as this you cannot have an application straight across the board without having the commission look at specific areas and define certain regions as requiring a different unemployment rate.

Each time that I have spoken either in committee or in the House I have tried to show that these provisions, the extension of the variable entrance requirements for the 18 months, are harsh as they affect certain areas. There should be a time for which today, if it is 16 weeks a person must earn, that person should know that it will be 16 weeks. In the month of December people cannot be told that it is 19 weeks based on an unemployment insurance rate of September when there is full employment. The effect on individuals is harsh. While we have an unemployment insurance program, as we do today, we cannot have provisions which are not treating all areas of high unemployment in the same way.

For the many reasons about which I have spoken in the past, I must say I am disappointed to see that this bill will pass the House without Parliament having found solutions to the problems which I have said have created inequitable treatment, something which I feel is unwarranted for the next two years.

Mr. Benno Friesen (Surrey-White Rock-North Delta): Mr. Speaker, I just want to add a few words to what the hon. member for South West Nova (Miss Campbell) has already said. I agree with much of what she has had to say regarding this bill. There are inequities inherent in a variable entrance program. She has mentioned that the variable entry with respect to time creates some inherent injustices. I would add, and she may have mentioned this earlier, that there is also some injustice when it is based on geographical districts. Someone who qualifies on one side of the street may be different from someone who qualifies on the other side of the street.

However, I would like to point out that the most inequitable legislation and regulation can be modified and softened if the right kind of personnel are in the unemployment insurance or manpower offices. I am afraid that that kind of human approach to people on unemployment insurance is being lost in our manpower centres today. I come particularly to the point of the regrouping of the offices, that is, the combining of the manpower offices with the UIC offices. I remember a few years ago when we were debating that legislation in this House and the former member for Timiskaming was suggesting that he remembered the times when the UIC and manpower offices were together and you could see the unemployment board, the jobs wanted board, and the jobs available board, all in the one