

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

can rely on the Canadian Government to address their problems. Unfortunately that is not the case.

It is a source of great concern to me when many of my constituents call me asking if I can find them a job. They tell me they are having difficulty getting in touch unemployment insurance and are experiencing difficulty getting with the bureaucracy. As mentioned yesterday by my colleague, the Hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), people are even unable to get hold of the unemployment insurance office. I have a constituent in Pouch Cove who spent days trying to get through on the telephone to the unemployment insurance office to ask a simple question so he could fill out his forms and collect his unemployment insurance. He spent one entire day on the telephone trying to get through. It was busy, then no answer. Busy, no answer.

The Government's approach and attitude with massive numbers of people unemployed is to set up a system to treat them as statistics, cards in a computer system. I am pleased to see that the Hon. Member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception (Mr. Johnson), himself a Newfoundlander with many constituents with similar problems, recognizes the inadequacy of the Government's response.

There is a need for a proper unemployment insurance system. What is evident from the necessity of this legislation is the far greater need for economic opportunities for Newfoundland, in the Atlantic provinces and in the regions of this country that are suffering because the Canadian economy and the government policy has left them behind.

We Newfoundlanders have been part of Confederation for getting on to 40 years. It is the whole of the country we look to for standards and leadership on national issues. We also look to Canada as a whole to fulfil our dreams of full participation in the nation. We cannot do that in a situation where the level of opportunity in Newfoundland is less than half, in fact far worse, than the national average. I think it comes down in the end to a question of respect for Newfoundlanders as individuals and as a people. We too ought to have a chance to participate at the same level in the Canadian life. As the Jew, Shylock, in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* said "If you prick us, do we not bleed?" The unemployed in Newfoundland and those who would like to make it to the unemployment rolls, who are not even recognized by statistics as being unemployed, are human beings. Sadly, our people are bleeding from the lack of policy and action on the part of the Government to overcome these problems.

• (1220)

The Government tries to give us hope with ideas that will not assist. It talks about the Atlantic Opportunities Agency. That agency was announced last June but I am told that it has not spent a cent other than on programs that already existed. For Newfoundlanders who are seeking employment and will have to suffer another winter without jobs, and in some cases without jobs and without unemployment insurance benefits,

that is not good enough. We need a commitment from the Government and a commitment from the people of Canada to see that Newfoundlanders are treated equally. This measure is necessary, and I am glad the Government has recognized that. However, it is a very weak response to a very serious problem.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Questions or comments? Debate.

Hon. William Rompkey (Grand Falls—White Bay—Labrador): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to say a few words on this Bill. I appreciate the comments of my colleague, the Hon. Member for St. John's East (Mr. Harris). I think he has put the case very well. I would like to add a few points if I may.

The Hon. Member talked about the unemployment rate and the participation rate. I would like to add that among young people in Newfoundland, the official unemployment rate, according to Statistics Canada, is 50 per cent. While the official unemployment rate for the population as a whole is one that will not be seen in other parts of Canada as absolutely tragic, although we see it that way at home, the official rate among young people is tragic.

My hon. colleague was quite right in talking about alternatives. Young people will have to have alternatives. What will be their alternatives? There is a whole generation growing up now asking, "What is there for us to do, what is the point in getting all this training, and what is there for us to do when we finish?"

We must emphasize the young people particularly, their unemployment rate, their participation rate and the opportunities that will be available to them when they finish training. That is an aspect of the question I wish to add to the very useful, helpful and accurate summary made by my colleague from St. John's East.

It is too bad that we are here debating the *status quo*. What a tragedy it is that we are only going that far. The Government is only prepared to keep the *status quo* going for another 12 months.

We brought in the regional rate of entry in the first instance for 133 months. Will the situation change in 12 months? If so, I would like to know how the Government will change it.

Let me describe for government Members the situation. Official Department of Fisheries and Oceans statistics show that the catch rate in the inshore fishery has gone down consistently over the past six years. Bear in mind that the inshore fishery is fundamental to many communities in my riding, in the riding of the Hon. Member for St. John's East and in the riding of the Hon. Member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception (Mr. Johnson). There are so many communities that are dependent on that inshore fishery. Yet the statistics have shown that over the past six years the catch rate has gone down. That means that inshore fishermen, fishermen with boats anywhere from 20 feet to 45 feet, are catching fewer fish and therefore can qualify less and less