

Unemployment Insurance Act

to work. These people should be given that opportunity, which has nothing to do with how much money they have paid in. I am not talking about that at all. I am trying to emphasize the part that it is time we considered what this government is doing to our senior citizens.

We heard the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde)—I will only digress for a moment—talk about spouses. What he said was discouraging and disillusioning to a lot of people between age 60 and 65. The minister, in effect, said that a spouse would be looked after, but he would not even recognize the fact that within the bill a spouse would, in effect, be either party to the marriage.

There seems to be a trend to put the blame on our senior citizens for a good many things. This is not the correct approach. We must be more concerned in seeing that these people are kept in the work force in order that those who wish to do so can still make a contribution. We believe that many of them still have a great contribution to make. The minister says that this program will cost the country in the neighbourhood of \$120 million. What we should look at is the way in which this government is climbing on the backs of our senior citizens. This government and the minister should be more concerned with reducing high unemployment, the national rate now being about 7.3 per cent. A 1 per cent reduction in that rate would save a great deal of money, without picking on our senior citizens to whom we owe so much.

We are extremely worried about this kind of approach by the government. We do not understand the government's thinking, and we will not accept this kind of move. We on this side of the House register our concern and we will not go along with the government in this regard. We will not go along with the government's attitude in respect of our senior citizens or its attitude in respect of calling a sponsor under LIP or LEAP a self-employed person who, under ordinary circumstances, would not come within the confines of this act but will now because of this government's thinking. For these reasons I have moved that Clause 1 of the bill relating to these matters be struck.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, at this point we are debating report stage motions Nos. 1 and 2 at the same time. They are similar in that each of them would do something to clause 1 of the bill. As the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) has pointed out, his report stage motion No. 1 would strike out clause 1 of the bill in its entirety. My report stage motion No. 2 would strike out only subclause (2) from clause 1 of the bill.

That may sound as though we are being very fine in our perception of the situation. May I point out that subclauses (1) and (3) of clause 1 of the bill propose to bring under unemployment insurance coverage certain individuals not now covered. In the main, those are persons who are sponsoring certain programs funded by the federal or by other governments. We suggest that if the individuals working in these groups are entitled to unemployment insurance coverage, the sponsors or the persons in charge of the project should also be covered.

It is for this reason we welcome the inclusion of subclauses (1) and (3) in clause 1 of the bill, and that is the

[Mr. Alexander.]

reason I put down my report stage motion No. 2 in wording different from that of the hon. member for Hamilton West what I wanted to pinpoint was the need to strike out subclause (2) of clause 1.

● (1530)

One or more of my colleagues will have something to say about our position particularly as it pertains to subclauses (1) and (3), but I want to make, in a strong terms as I can, the case for the removal of subclause (2) from clause 1. Subclause (2) is the portion of this bill which would deny to persons 65 years of age or over any participation in the unemployment insurance program either as contributors or as recipients of unemployment insurance benefits. With the part of the speech of the hon. member for Hamilton West which dealt with this matter, I am in full agreement. I was glad to hear him speak as strongly as he did, and I hope that there will be many members from all parties in this House who will support our contention that the right to participation in unemployment insurance should not be denied to persons between age 65 and age 70.

As the previous speaker pointed out, one of the arguments advanced by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) is that by making this change the government will save \$120 million a year. That, of course, comes as a very cruel argument since in effect we are being told that the government wants to get out of some of its unemployment insurance financial difficulties by imposing this burden on senior citizens between age 65 and 70.

Sometimes it is argued that in this age bracket there are large numbers of persons who really do not want to work and wish merely to carry on their unemployment insurance participation to the point where they can then pick up benefits. I submit that is probably less true of persons between age 65 and age 70 than it is of persons in the lower age brackets. By the time persons have reached an age between 65 and 70 they have a pretty responsible attitude. This is a 67-year old saying it, so I can confirm it. I suggest that the notion of exploiting or abusing the fund is less likely to be the case with persons in this age bracket than in any of the other brackets below that age level. In any case, the Minister of Manpower and Immigration made it clear in the committee that it is possible for the government, with its extensive use of computers, to ascertain those who really do not want employment, those who are turning it down.

I suggest that that method of denying people unemployment insurance, while in some instances we think it is very rough, is much more fair than applying the refusal to a particular age group. The government says it can sort out the married women, the young persons or the persons of advanced age who really do not want to work and therefore should not receive benefits. If they can do that with those categories, they can do it with those persons between age 65 and 70. I think it is unfair to deny arbitrarily to everyone between age 65 and 70 the right to participate in unemployment insurance either as contributors or as recipients of benefits.

Therefore, because, like the hon. member for Hamilton West, I think this is most unfair, I hope the House will support my motion No. 2 for the deletion of subclause (2)