

Employment and Immigration

decisions or proposed decisions, or any policies set within the Unemployment Insurance Commission, would use Statistics Canada figures, or figures from studies which would then be available to persons outside the commission, that is, groups of persons or individuals who have business with the Unemployment Insurance Commission or who wish to take a look at the way in which the commission's policies are administered, particularly members of parliament.

I said that with good reason, with good justification, because in effect the basis for the changes we are now debating to Bill C-27 was in the comprehensive review of the unemployment insurance program which was done in 1973-74. One has to realize that there are some important proposals in Bill C-27. The proposals range from changing the minor attachment period from eight to ten weeks, and after three years it becomes 14 weeks. It also includes some important changes with respect to the length of the benefit period in effect. It was always based on the comprehensive review of the unemployment insurance program which was done in 1973-74, and the only reference to the source of the information on which the comprehensive review was based is listed as the administrative data of the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

So here we have a commission which does its own in-house studies, its own so-called narrative reports which are available only to the commission. We were told that this information was for the commission, that they put it through the process, strained it, and came out with these proposals. Here we have very important changes being contemplated and debated by parliament, yet the source and the basis for these changes are not available to members of parliament and we have no way of examining the veracity of the statements made.

As a matter of fact, I raised this question in committee when we discussed the bill. I wanted to know the basis for the comprehensive review. I read from the proceedings on the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration of April 20, 1977, at which the minister was present with officials from his department. The following statement was made by Mr. Manion:

Madam Chairman, there have been other studies done in addition to the comprehensive review. I believe Mr. Cullen or Mr. Hodder mentioned the very recent study done on the industrial patterns in the high unemployment areas to see whether there were employers who offered only eight weeks of work, and the result of that study is that there were very, very few such employers. There may be individuals who worked only eight weeks at a stretch, but generally there was employment of longer duration available for them, except in very scattered, isolated instances.

I asked if they had any figures, and Mr. Manion replied:

No. I believe Mr. Hodder indicated that that was based on a review done recently by our own staff. It is not a statistical review. It is one in which the report is on a narrative basis.

He went on to say:

That report consists of a narrative report from our own officers. It is not a statistical report and it is not available in a form that is suitable for publication.

That is the point we are making, that we have a review of a very important bureaucracy in the federal government, and we are debating very extensive changes. These changes will have an impact on the lives of many people in this country. The

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

impact will be greater in some parts than it will in others. In particular, Atlantic Canada will be greatly affected by the impact of Bill C-27 which is based on in-house studies and narrative reports. I have in my hand an example of a narrative report which we squeezed out of the bureaucracy at the committee hearing. Great insights are found in this. It is called "Employment Patterns in the Atlantic Provinces". This was done by the Unemployment Insurance Commission in May of 1977, and it is entitled "A report on the impact of increasing unemployment insurance minimum entrance requirements in the Atlantic provinces to ten weeks of insured employment". This statement came from a senior assistant deputy minister, Mr. Manion. It reads:

● (1120)

In the light of the observed employment patterns of most industries in the Atlantic provinces, the majority of workers should have little or no difficulty in meeting the higher minimum entrance requirements—

Here are some of the conclusions in that report:

1. Generally speaking, it would appear that there are few industries or firms which are limited to less than ten weeks of operation in any 12-month period. Those which are so constrained, employ few workers.

2. Although individual components of the fishing industry may be of very short duration (e.g. lobster, herring) most fishermen have little difficulty in operating for more than ten weeks since they typically engage in more than one component of the industry.

I go to conclusion No. 6:

6. Canada Manpower centres have reported instances of potential claimants quitting their jobs at the peak of the season—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to inform the hon. member that his allotted time has expired.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Carry on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Is the hon. member given unanimous consent to carry on?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank my colleagues. Conclusion No. 6 continues as follows:

—so that they will qualify with the highest average insured earnings possible—

That is the kind of value judgment which is being made—potential claimants quitting their jobs at the peak of the season so they will qualify with the highest average insurance possible. In addition, this document goes on to say the following:

—there are indications that a number of workers arrange to be laid off once qualified for UI so that someone else may obtain eight weeks of insured employment.

Someone should point out that that is called sharing work. Obviously, according to the commission, people were stuck on the concept of sharing work a long time before the minister put this provision into the bill. People do share work and, obviously, the benefits of the Unemployment Insurance Act. However, we would be happy if the department and the minister would extend that amendment to provide that any contemplated changes in policy or in legislation ought to be based on verifiable facts supplied by an agency which is recognized as