

Unemployment Insurance Act

derogatory statement, completely ignores that if it were not for the fact that so many women are working and so many women are in the working force, not only would the work force lose some of its most vital workers, but the ranks of the poor in this country would swell. But, sir, such facts as that do not intrude upon the government's attitudes, which remain, in spite of their fine words to the contrary, ambivalent or, even worse, squarely against the attainment of equal opportunity for women in this country.

The clauses in this bill pertaining to part-time workers, and to entrants and re-entrants to the labour force, contain exactly the intent the Prime Minister put forth when he spoke in derogatory terms of women entering the work force, equating that fact with increasing unemployment in this country.

If the minister has forgotten, perhaps I can remind him of what the National Action Committee said when it appeared before the committee. When Carole Swan presented the brief she said:

—various policy and program changes that are being acted upon or enacted by the government are having the effect of driving out of the labour force those workers that they consider marginal and secondary, particularly women—

That is what the National Action Committee said to the minister, but did he take that advice or listen to those words when he was considering this bill?

We now find that when the government runs out of arguments that put the blame for unemployment on women who have jobs or who want jobs, it often acts as though women who lose their jobs are intent on abusing the unemployment insurance system. That is what the intent of this bill is all about.

Let me say to the minister that independent research has shown that the unemployment insurance scheme has not had a significant impact on women's participation in the labour force, either to encourage it or to discourage it.

An hon. Member: Name your source.

Miss MacDonald: I will name my source. It is a C. D. Howe Research Institute report entitled "Opportunity for Choice", and I would recommend it to the hon. member as it will give him some insight into what women in the work force do for this country. This institute studied unemployment insurance, it studies women workers, and it concluded by stating:

When we removed the effect of trend factors and the influences of business cycle, the recent changes in our Unemployment Insurance Act have not had a different effect on female than on male unemployment rates. Recent high female unemployment relative to males can be attributed more to trend and cyclical factors than to unemployment insurance.

That is what the report said, yet the government persists in the mistaken belief that women do not need—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member but her allotted time has expired.

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I wonder if the hon. member would answer a question?

[Miss MacDonald.]

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Her time has expired.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Order, please. This would require unanimous consent, and I take it there is not unanimous consent.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Hugh A. Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to participate in this debate a few days before Christmas, and it is certainly a great pleasure to me to see that the spirit of Christmas has pervaded the House. I suppose the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands (Miss MacDonald) can no longer be referred to as a "red Tory", but as a "green Tory".

An hon. Member: Ho, ho, ho!

Mr. Anderson: What we have heard from the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands is a proposition I never thought would be put forward in this House, that the unity of Canada depends on a greater amount of unemployment benefits to Canadians. If one followed that argument to its logical conclusion, if we spent \$8 billion rather than \$4 billion, we would have twice the unity in Canada that we have today. Mr. Speaker, that is patent nonsense.

● (1522)

Mr. Dionne (Northumberland-Miramichi): All of her speech was.

Mr. Anderson: The second assertion made by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands was that Bill C-14 hits hardest those individuals in high unemployment areas who are least able to find employment. The reduction in UI benefit expenditures for Canada as a whole in the fiscal year 1979-80 is 14 per cent. If we look at the Atlantic provinces, we see that in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia the percentage reduction is less than for Canada as a whole. For example, the rate is 13.1 per cent in Newfoundland, and 12.5 per cent in Nova Scotia. In the case of New Brunswick it is equal to the national average, and in Prince Edward Island it is slightly over 15.2 per cent.

The point which has been missed by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands and, with all deference, by the New Democratic Party as well, is that the distribution of funds to the employment strategy will more than compensate all provinces for the loss of funds attributable to the amendments in Bill C-14. For example, in 1979-1980, the \$710 million employment strategy, together with the \$300 million employment development fund, yields expenditures substantially in excess of the total Bill C-14 programmed savings for 1979-1980. In that period the funds which will be decreased in unemployment insurance amount to \$655 million. If the same employment strategy figures are applied to 1980-1981, they are still estimated to be greater than the estimated Bill C-14 programmed savings which are estimated to be \$935 million.