

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Alexander moves Motion No. 7:

That Bill C-69, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, be amended by deleting Clause 6.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Rodriguez moves Motion No. 8:

That Bill C-69, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, be amended by deleting Clause 6.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Alexander moves Motion No. 14:

That Bill C-69, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, be amended by deleting Clause 12.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Mr. Rodriguez moves Motion No. 15:

That Bill C-69, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, be amended by deleting Clause 12.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I have had some delightful news from my House leader. I may not reveal it at this time because it is extremely confidential but I can say it is most encouraging in terms of Christmas—I will put it that way. Therefore I do not intend to take up much time.

An hon. Member: Is Christmas coming this year?

Mr. Alexander: What we are attempting to bring home to the government is the unacceptability of the amendments it has produced with respect to the poor. This amendment of mine affects those at the lower end of the income scale.

● (1750)

Section 24(1) of the Act provides as follows:

The rate of weekly benefit payable to a claimant for a week that falls in an initial benefit period

(a) in the case of a claimant without a dependant is an amount equal to sixty-six and two-thirds per cent of his average weekly insurable earnings in his qualifying weeks or twenty dollars, whichever is the greater,

Pausing there, this provision applies to a person who, without a dependant, is entitled to unemployment insurance equal to 66⅔ per cent of his insurable earnings. Then in the same provision, the government, in its wisdom, said, "Just a minute, we must be more concerned, rightly or wrongly, about those who have dependants and are faced with financial hardship". The key phrase there is "who have dependants". Therefore section 24(1)(b) went on to provide:

—in the case of a claimant with a dependant is an amount equal to

(i) seventy-five per cent of his average weekly insurable earnings in his qualifying weeks or twenty dollars, whichever is the greater—

In other words, in 1971 the government said the amount for single people is 66⅔ per cent of their average weekly insurable earnings and for those with dependants 75 per cent. This could have been questioned in the first place in terms of pure insurance. But this is not the only area in which the government moved away from the principle of pure insurance; sickness and pregnancy were added, I think as a result of the International Labour Organization convention which declared that these events amounted to the involuntary removal of a person from the work force. The insurance scheme, as it were, was destroyed at that time, even though I have continued to bring home to the

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minister that we want a program that is insurance oriented, not one combined with welfare or one that destroys the work ethic.

In Clause 6 of this amending bill the government is providing as follows:

Subsection 24(1) of the said Act is replaced and the following substituted therefor:

"24. (1) The rate of weekly benefit payable to a claimant for a week that falls in an initial benefit period is an amount equal to sixty-six and two-thirds per cent of his average weekly insurable earnings in his qualifying weeks or twenty dollars, whichever is the greater."

In other words, everyone will now receive the percentage of 66⅔ per cent in the initial benefit period, and I wonder why. Upon questioning the minister we find that the amount of money to be saved is something like \$30 million, though to be fair to the minister this is out of a total of some \$3.75 billion. I think the minister thought I was going to say \$4 billion.

Mr. Andras: It is \$3.4 billion.

Mr. Alexander: In the long run I think it will be \$3.75 billion. In other words, to make it look as if the government is credible in its attack on the high cost of unemployment insurance we are going to shaft the poor. The government has forgotten all about the reasoning used by the minister's predecessor, the Postmaster General (Mr. Mackasey), in 1971 as to why this provision was necessary. He related it to the cost of food and shelter. We all cast a quizzical eye on that move, but nevertheless it made sense.

Things are even tougher today as a result of the government's archaic approach to the fight against inflation, especially now that we have a bill that will not work. The dependants who require this extra money are going to be the ones hardest hit. At the same time there is going to be an increase in premiums. We do not like the flip flop of the government in this regard, which says that because dependants get \$20 per child under the Family Allowance Act they no longer need nor should they require benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act at an extended rate in the initial benefit period.

I say that the payment under the family allowance scheme has nothing whatsoever to do with unemployment insurance. You pay your money and you get your benefits, as they say in the street, and that is as it should be. For some reason the minister wants to save money. He may be saving money, but at the same time, with the environmental malaise that a lot of these people suffer from, further payments will have to be made under our social assistance plan since the minister feels that what was right for 1971 is wrong for 1975.

I see it is now six o'clock, so may I call it six o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It being six o'clock I do now leave the chair until eight o'clock this evening.

At six o'clock the House took recess.