

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mr. Speaker, I say the bill was parachuted because the government is imposing its passage through a closure motion; for my part, I certainly do not accept that willingly. The Canadian people surely deserve better than a government that legislates too hastily on matters as important as family allowances and unemployment insurance.

I do not want to limit myself to criticizing the government; I also wish to explain my line of thought and my attitude towards this bill we have all been discussing in the last few days. The present unemployment insurance system is a necessary evil, some claim, necessary for sure, but also evil in that it is an insult to the dignity of man. What people want is work and not unemployment insurance benefits. That is probably what the minister had in mind when he introduced this bill, but the means suggested to do it are absolutely contrary to the basic principles of good public administration.

At a time when the country faces the highest rate of unemployment it has known in many a year, cuts in the unemployment insurance benefits are certainly not indicated. Let us not forget that the majority of those who will be deprived of unemployment benefits will fall back on welfare, the social cost of which is extremely high. The unemployed is looked upon as a worker without work, whereas people on welfare are relegated to the lowest rank of society.

It would be pointless for me, at this stage of the debate, to go into each and every detail of every proposal contained in this bill. Besides, my colleagues have already explained to the House the views of the Social Credit Party of Canada on this bill. However, I wish to make a few comments on the essential features of the bill which makes it entirely unacceptable. First, those proposals are extremely arbitrary. Second, they will have nefarious effects on many disadvantaged unemployed and will deprive them of the benefits which some members of the working force especially the most vulnerable ones, should enjoy. They all deal with, the unemployed. Third, those proposals do not solve nor remove the hindrances referred to in connection with dishonest unemployed. Fourth, those proposals are very difficult to understand and still more difficult to enforce.

Incidentally, the parliamentary secretary, the member for Wellington (Mr. Maine) said yesterday that the Social Crediters were not interested in the bill. I would like to point out that if he wants to be charitable, as he believes he is, he should go and administer an unemployment insurance office after the bill is implemented and he will then realize that he is no longer in the constituency of Wellington protected by the popularity of the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau). He will realize that facing the unemployed is much more difficult than enjoying the popularity of the Prime Minister.

This bill comes on the heels of a costly publicity campaign aimed at portraying the unemployed as a bunch of crooks and parasites. That campaign has been conducted in spite of objective statistics which proved that there is a real lack of

[Mr. Beaudoin.]

jobs available. The number of jobs available is ridiculously small when compared to the number of unemployed looking for a job. Still, I am giving the benefit of a reasonable doubt to those we call swindlers of the unemployment insurance system because those we believe are swindlers are actually people who need to earn money to eat. I do not think we should call these people swindlers just because they need unemployment insurance benefits to buy their groceries; it is as simple as that. Some measures affect the unemployed who are members of a category which we want to despise and which we call repeaters.

● (1422)

The government seems anxious to avoid mentioning the real facts at the root of the unemployment problem. It constantly refers to steps aimed at encouraging our people who are out of work to seek employment, but without ever mentioning the real lack of job vacancies available, with some 60,000 job openings for a million unemployed. We should not put too much of the blame on unstable working habits. We may wonder if last spring advertising campaign which tended to assimilate the unemployed with cheaters and the introduction of this government bill are just a coincidence or a scheme by the federal government to hide its ineptitude at creating new jobs without depriving the most unfortunate members of our society of the money it needs to set up employment programs.

We believe that this government really wants to create a Canadian bank of cheap labour. The worker who holds an insurable job and who has already received benefits will not dare leave his job no matter what, even though painful working conditions may endanger his health, his security and what have you. A job on any terms, that is what is meant in the legislation. The minister himself indicated that when he said the new scheme would make low paying jobs more attractive. Those are key notes in this legislation. As the minister suggests, the purpose of the measures proposed is to reinject more money in job creation. Why has it not occurred to him that he could take that money from the rich, from the multinationals for example, instead of taking it from those who do not have money at all or are expecting a mere pittance from unemployment insurance to eat and give their family something to eat?

With this bill the government wants to save \$2.5 billion in the long term, and in the short term \$1.5 billion within two years. That is how they will get that amount of \$1.5 billion because, again it does not hurt too much those who have more money. Mr. Speaker, that is unacceptable in my opinion. Yesterday all members witnessed how little courage the majority party has shown in favour of the poor when they used their majority in the House to defeat by vote 29 amendments which could have affected the bill. I hope the poor, and here I mean the unemployed, will remember that at the next general election.