

Unemployment Insurance Act
GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT, 1971

MEASURE TO ADD NEW CLASS OF INSURABLE EMPLOYMENT

The House resumed, from Tuesday, December 16, 1975, consideration of Bill C-69, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, and of motions Nos. 11 and 12 of the hon. members for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) and for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles).

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, this is to supplement some of my comments I made last night. I know that we are about to adopt this bill, which appears most important to us on this side of the House.

Last night I took the opportunity to make a last appeal to all my colleagues of this House, considering the refusal by the government to make any change to its original proposition. I still think it is my duty to reiterate this representation today and to urge the majority of hon. members to prevail upon the minister to consider the suggestions which have already been made in this House. I know that many statistical and evaluation data have been given. We are also aware of the fact that, in order to bring about the necessary cuts in the federal government budget, we are presenting legislation which seems unfair to us. I contend that the injustices which we spotted in this bill have also been recognized not only by hon. members of the opposition parties but also by some government members as well.

Therefore, for the sake of curtailing expenditures, the government is bringing forward legislation which provides for increased contributions, for decreased benefits and, what affects us most, for the disentitlement to unemployment benefits of people aged 65. However, Mr. Speaker, I do not think there is one hon. member in this House who would not acknowledge the applications which are made in our constituencies by those senior citizens who wish to withdraw from the labour market but would like to keep receiving the benefits the Canadian Parliament had granted them. To the risk of repeating myself, Mr. Speaker, I would like, before the bill is adopted, to appeal to the compassion of the government which has been, hitherto, insensitive. Last night I mentioned how cruel it was of the government to deny those people the benefits they are entitled to. I would not like to have to infer that this government is heartless, Mr. Speaker, when it refuses to heed the pleas and representations made in the House by several hon. members and not only by my colleagues of the Progressive Conservative Party.

Mr. Speaker, we are still hoping that at the last moment the minister will consider improving this bill to make it acceptable not only to one party, but to Parliament as a whole.

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that many representations have been made to all hon. members. I am also convinced that the government members would have liked the minister to be more attentive to representations made in committee at second reading or now in the House. I hope that

[Mr. Blais.]

we shall be able to take a few more minutes to make the minister understand our representations and the need to improve this bill so that it may meet the needs of the people involved. If it is a question of appealing to common sense, Mr. Speaker, I would like to do so. I truly wonder what has been happening since the last election, for instance, since all the legislation that has been introduced has only increased the difficulties facing Canadians.

We know very well, Mr. Speaker, that tomorrow new cuts will be announced and we can already guess that the less favoured people will have to suffer the burden of this legislation. Proposals are now before the House which will cause hardship for certain people who do not deserve it. As concerns the people aged 65 and over, who deserve the respect of parliamentarians, who have worked for 40 or 45 years, who have paid unemployment insurance for 30 years or more, the bill now before the House is the gift that the government wants to give them just before the Holiday Season to thank them.

For all these reasons, Mr. Speaker, I would like my comments to be brief. I hope that the minister will realize the importance of this legislation, the hardship that it brings to this group of people, the difficulties that it will cause. We therefore hope that he will amend the legislation and act like someone who seems to understand the difficulties facing Canadians today.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that we shall have good news for these people. There could not be any greater gift for these unfortunate people before the Holiday Season than to see the government act in their favour. It seems to me that the minister cannot be unmoved by the appeal I am making on their behalf.

[English]

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, I have been discussing this matter with my colleagues who, as I indicated, can speak on this subject with impartiality. As you know, Mr. Speaker, there are not too many people who can discuss this clause in the abstract, with disinterest, because most of us will eventually reach the age when this law will apply to us.

I was interested to hear the arguments put forward by UIC regarding this clause, and I was particularly interested in the difficulties which the UIC indicated had been apparent to them in the operation of that provision which affected people between the age of 65 and 70, a category of people between the ages 65 and 69 under this bill. Before this bill was put before the House there was a choice, when you reached the age of 70, whether or not one applied for the Canada Pension Plan or Quebec Pension Plan benefits. In my experience, this affected two classes of people: first, those who were being retired compulsorily, which included civil servants, railway people and some of the highly organized sectors of our labour force who in many instances were going to receive a pension. So with respect to those people, the provision applied in a totally different manner to the way it applied to others in the same category. Those who had to retire on a certain date had to decide whether they would retire or take work in another field.