

Unemployment Insurance Act

Moreover, they have decided to reduce unemployment insurance benefits from 66½ per cent to 60 per cent. Once again the people who have the smaller incomes will have to pay more. They will get 6⅓ less in benefits and have to cope with an 8.6 per cent rate of inflation, so that their purchasing power will be reduced by 15 per cent. Are they going to keep on penalizing the meek who need help most?

Ever since I was elected to the House, most of the bills which have been introduced have been detrimental to the poor. This bill is a fine example of this. The unions have denounced this bill. I feel the CSD has clearly expressed my point of view when it said that through this bill and specifically clause 1, the government was penalizing everybody. It was assumed that Quebec workers would rather work than be unemployed and I do believe so too. Second, the federal government must create conditions that will help to create jobs. That is not what it is doing today. Third, the federal government ought to make an all-out attempt to see that workers do not suffer from the closing down of businesses. I think an effort has to be done in that area too. Fourth, the federal government must stop making cuts in its social programs.

That is the opinion of the CSD, a union from where I come from. But the CSD is not the only one that made representations. People in my riding, in cities like Saint-Flavien, Dosquet, Victoriaville and Warwick did send me letters, did make representations so I would rise against this bill which penalizes people. We certainly are not against the fact that cheaters ought to be penalized, we are not against turning down those who abuse the system. But like the Economic Council of Canada, we recognize that four out of five persons who draw unemployment insurance do so because they have no choice. Only a minority of people abuse the system and not the majority of them.

And now they have decided to penalize the majority because of a particular small group. In the administration of all our social legislation, if not all our legislation, we see people who try to cheat. But are we going to change all this legislation? Are we going to make it still more restrictive and penalize the good? I say this on the basis that the good should not pay for the bad inside the system. We should have guidelines, we should have all kinds of possibilities to make our legislation applicable, to prevent cheating as much as possible, but to give all those who are really eligible the social advantages we have.

Furthermore, we are going to penalize our seasonal workers because it will be necessary to have 20 weeks of insurable employment to be able to receive unemployment insurance benefits. In my area there are construction workers who are going to find it difficult to accumulate 20 weeks of employment because of bad weather in winter and of a decline in the construction industry. There are also in my area clothing industries, a very disturbed, and even menaced sector, which does not give employment 12 months a year, unfortunately. The majority of the workers in that industry are women. It will

[Mr. Janelle.]

be difficult for those women to meet the requirement of 20 weeks of insurable employment.

● (1522)

We are told that exceptions will be made in areas which will show an unemployment rate lower than 11.5 per cent according to Statistics Canada. There, one will be eligible for unemployment benefits after having worked a lesser number of weeks. But because of these new provisions, a lot of these unemployed people who collect benefits will be dropped off the rolls. There will be no more areas where the unemployment rate will be 11.5 per cent; it will be impossible. They will disappear from the statistics. We know that as of now the statistics are misleading. They say: in your area you have approximately a 12 per cent to 13 per cent rate of unemployment. But that does not mean 12 per cent to 13 per cent unemployed. It does not take into account people on welfare people who have basic needs. Are we just going to say: As for you, you may starve to death. Our social laws no longer apply to you. You are no longer entitled to unemployment benefits. They will have to turn to welfare where there will be hassles, where one will have to kneel in order to try and get something. We have now reached that stage.

Here we are faced with a callous government which does not remember what it is to have a heart, to think of the underprivileged, to think of all the people of Canada who have to be able to live. To me these cuts are not the answer. Women are penalized and we know that in every piece of social legislation they are always the ones hardest hit. Women are penalized as well as young people who are out of school and looking for a job without finding one. Why? Because there are none. The labour market seems to have reached the saturation point, and no new jobs are being created.

In my own riding of Lotbinière in the last year alone it would be easy to count on the fingers of one hand how many new industries did settle in the area. This is not due to a lack of manpower but to a lack of purchasing power on the part of the people. And now a little more of their purchasing power is being whittled down. The sale of our products will be made a little more difficult.

An hon. Member: Go and see them!

Mr. Janelle: An hon. member from the other side tells me to go and see them. I do not think that the Montreal area is in a much better position, not that there is no unemployment there. I think that unemployment is now a national problem. I think that when we are close to the million mark, when there are almost one million unemployed, a responsible government must of necessity confront the problem and take some action in order to help the people.

This piece of legislation seeks to eliminate swindlers. I agree with that and, as I said a moment ago, I am prepared to help the government get rid of swindlers, but some people in my