

stigmatized by Canadian society. That is deplorable, Mr. Speaker.

● (1650)

The emphasis on abuse is frankly degrading. When we discuss medicare in this House, as we will, I hope we will not dwell for hours and days on end on the doctors who rip off medicare—and there are a few. When we discuss automobile insurance surely we will not spend days and weeks discussing the dishonest garageman or repairman who helps pad a dishonest citizen's repair bill. Of course, there are people who abuse the unemployment insurance system.

What irks me is the fact that statistics are available now, in 1980, based on the experience with unemployment insurance in the 1970s, but not many people have bothered to study them. Where is the great Canadian Labour Congress that the NDP endorsed? Why was their voice so silent in the 1970s about protecting unemployment insurance? Was it because they represent the 30 per cent to 33 per cent of the work force who have job security and therefore are not prepared to do something about their social conscience? Did they worry about the unemployed person who is not unionized and has to work for substandard wages? I have seen no evidence of that as one who has observed the Unemployment Insurance Act. There has not been a decent voice in the Congress on this subject since Andy Andras departed.

I have looked at those statistics, however, and I am particularly interested in the impact of the eight-week eligibility feature. I am particularly interested today because most of the hon. members who have spoken in this House have made rather emotional and logical pleas for something to be done about the 10-14 week attachment requirement to be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

The hon. member for York-Sunbury (Mr. Howie), who is a former privy councillor and a very sensitive human being, made a strong plea yesterday that New Brunswick be considered an area where ten weeks be the criterion for eligibility for unemployment insurance. Mr. Speaker, in the sixties it was 30 weeks, over a two-year period. We brought in eight weeks as the benchmark in 1971. When I checked the figures in 1974, the particular group of people that qualified for unemployment insurance after only eight weeks was the one group that remained on unemployment insurance for the shortest period of time. They were prepared to find work, to leave unemployment insurance after eight, nine, ten or 12 weeks, rather than stay as they perhaps could have, by using a little deceit, for the full term. The full term could have been almost a year in regions of high unemployment. That they did not is testimony to their honesty.

In the seventies, eight weeks was regarded as something terrible and a series of amendments was brought in to the Unemployment Insurance Act which in effect meant giving in to those reactionaries who thought that way. The period was increased to 20 weeks, but no, that was too much. Then it was reduced to 14 and now it is ten to 14 weeks. We are coming very close to the original concept of eight weeks.

### *Unemployment Insurance Act*

I want to speak now of something that bothers me, Mr. Speaker, and I think the minister should be aware of it. This is not based on hearsay but on facts and years of digging into statistics and reading documents. Several people are engaged in writing a document on unemployment insurance and just last week one of them borrowed some of my documents.

When the bill was brought in in 1971, there was within months a concerted effort in the country—in the editorial pages and other places—to stress the alleged abuse of the system as a result of the eight-week period. Mr. Speaker, the French people have a saying, "*Qui profite du crime?*" which means, "who benefits by the crime?" I have to say that a certain group in the civil service, concerned that they were unable to justify their 4 per cent prediction and hard pressed to find the money needed to offset the government's commitment, felt that a series of amendments was needed to shift the financial obligation for some of the provisions in the Unemployment Insurance Act from the government. They were not honest enough to admit they had miscalculated and had not anticipated, because of reasons beyond their control, a long period of 5 per cent, 6 per cent, 7 per cent or 8 per cent unemployment in the country.

It would have been more refreshing if they had admitted this and let Parliament bite the bullet and make the necessary changes. Instead, they set out to condition the people first by telling them that the changes were needed because of abuse of the system. When people became really upset about this alleged abuse, then they brought in the logical amendment to shift certain financial obligations from the government to the employer-employee. This probably cost \$1 billion in the decade of the seventies. But because of the sound economic concept of weekly premiums and universality of the work force, the employers and employees were able to absorb the transfer of these financial obligations to them from the government.

It was difficult for me to accept the fact that in preparing the groundwork for their amendments they had to stigmatize hundreds of thousands of people by suggesting they would prefer to draw unemployment insurance benefits rather than work. That is wrong, Mr. Speaker, and I am glad hon. members opposite have made that point so eloquently in the last two days. I would warn the minister to be careful over the next few years, because within weeks of the passage of our bill those many years ago there was a determination to destroy its very basic principle.

Just a month ago I spoke to a former employee of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. He reminded me of the party that took place when the bill was passed. Civil servants are hardworking and dedicated and it was the usual sort of thing. In the jubilation of that evening I had remarked to my staff that I was not sure the act would be intact by 1980. I was not sure if the bureaucrats were prepared to stand by the predictions and I was not sure if the government was prepared to assume its obligations for its fiscal and monetary policy. I was not sure if the government was that dedicated to controlling unemployment beyond 4 per cent or if it was prepared to