

Unemployment Insurance Act

to parliament with such an administrative record and tell the Canadian people that they have to save money by cracking down on those who can least afford to pay, simply boggles the mind. With their history of maladministration, overpayments, complete disinterest in pursuing the abuses, how can they now come to this House in the Christmas season and through you, Mr. Speaker, tell unemployed people in the areas such as Newfoundland where unemployment is highest, that the only way the government can save money is to crack on the benefits available to seasonal workers and the like? Even Scrooge, with all his miserliness and the other objectionable qualities, would be taxed to the utmost to try to put together an approach such as this.

As this bill unfolds and as other members have an opportunity to speak, it will become more and more obvious that what this government proposes is not socially just or financially sound, but is unacceptable in every way. If they seek to impose it by use of closure, for example, or whatever other parliamentary device they have by virtue of their majority—which will not last much longer—they will have to answer for it very soon when the election is called.

I cannot think of a better issue on which to fight the next election than this government's record, in the creation of unemployment and the methods they choose to try to fool the people by bringing in such a measure as this. I am sure that many members who have sat in this House much longer than I, have not seen the equal of it. This could best be described as the personification of poetic justice—that this government has to come before parliament at this time of year, in the lame duck period of its administrative life, at a time when it is trying to push national unity, at a time of decay for this country that it brought on, at a time after ten years of its administration under this Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) that has seen unemployment go up by several hundred per cent, at a time when the country's deficit and economic performance and social climate have never been more inhospitable to the type of measures the government is trying to bring forward.

Whether it is unemployment insurance or regional development to try to help the have-not areas, whether it is transportation, in order to bring some semblance of equality across the country, or energy rates, does not matter. It does not matter what sort of social or economic measures this government has tried to bring in, the record shows that matters have reached a state of decay. It is not possible to find any area of social or economic life in this country that has improved in the last ten years.

This particular measure hits people where they can least afford it. Their economic livelihood is affected, and this is something that cannot be excused.

To use a trite expression, Mr. Speaker, this is the last straw. This is the last administrative gasp of a government that has taken what used to be a reasonably good system that had some actuarial soundness and twisted it to where it is costing the country \$4 billion. All they can think of is to try to change it hastily. The hon. member for York Scarborough (Mr. McCrossan), one of the newest and one of the most able

[Mr. MacKay.]

members of this House, pointed out in committee that instead of looking at it in an administrative way that makes sense from an actuarial point of view, the government is taking a hamfisted approach, an unfair approach, an approach that is socially unjust and administratively unsound.

That is why, Mr. Speaker, none of us on this side of the House can understand this particular approach, and why I could never support a measure such as this.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Miss Coline Campbell (South Western Nova): Mr. Speaker, I should like to outline my concern regarding Bill C-14 which relates to the use by the Unemployment Insurance Commission of economic regions established by Statistics Canada to implement the repeater provision of the bill.

I notice that hon. members opposite are very vocal tonight, Mr. Speaker.

In reviewing the proposals in this bill, Mr. Speaker, I am sure it can be said that most people look forward to the amendments. There certainly has been a need to reform some of the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act. I would think that most people would support the provision that the minimum insurable earnings—if the bill is passed—will go up from \$48, or one-fifth of maximum insurable earnings, to 20 hours per week at minimum wage, or 30 per cent of the maximum insurable earnings if a person is on commission or piece work. At the present time this would be 30 per cent of the maximum insurable earnings, \$240, for minimum earnings on commission or piece work of \$72. It is my understanding that the saving in Nova Scotia is \$1.5 million.

● (2132)

The new entrance and re-entrance amendments will require people who are entering the work force to work for six months, and re-entrants, if they have not been part of the work force, to work for the last two years. Again this will mean a saving in Nova Scotia of \$15.5 million.

Another amendment reduces the rate of UI benefits from 66½ per cent to 60 per cent, which will become effective on January 1, if the bill is passed. This will mean a saving in Nova Scotia of \$23 million.

Had the provisions for the 33 per cent recovery of payments, the benefit repayment for higher income recipients, been in effect in 1978, the threshold would have been \$18,720, or coming from 1.5 times the yearly maximum insurable earnings, \$12,480, so there will be a 30 per cent recovery payment. The saving in Nova Scotia will be approximately \$0.6 million.

Let me return now to my area of concern in this bill, that is, the repeater provision. I would like to outline exactly what it would mean in Nova Scotia. This provision is for repeaters to the work force.

According to the variable entrance requirements, they will need up to six weeks of work over and above the present entrance requirement. This proposal would mean a higher entrance requirement for people during their qualifying peri-