

will help pay for benefits in Quebec and the Atlantic provinces.

It appears, Mr. Speaker, that this amendment to Bill C-27 reflects the government's continuing policy of placing restrictive measures against the unemployed, instead of pursuing economic measures to create long-term jobs. The unemployed of this country are being used as scapegoats by a government that does not have the guts to deal with our economic problems. Increasing the entry requirement will do little, except to satisfy those in this country who feel that the eight to 11-weekers are bums or cheaters looking for a free ride. Obviously, many of these people who complain about the unemployment insurance system have never experienced unemployment.

An hon. Member: I don't like that phrase.

Mr. Blackburn: Which phrase is the hon. member referring to? I missed it. Most of the people who are searching for work are doing so sincerely. They are not lazy bums. I do not know which member complained about those words, but it has certainly been my experience in my constituency office, when adults come in and weep in front of me. I am not being dramatic when I say this; it is absolutely true. They tell me they keep going back to the same industry week after week until they are told by the personnel manager, "Look, we don't want to see you back here". But the UIC says they have to go back, they have to make a job search. And where are they? The first thing they know, they are cut off. I don't deny that some do abuse the system, but from my experience with countless hundreds of UI cases, the benefit control offices of the Unemployment Insurance Commission do more than an adequate job of ensuring that no one draws benefits when not entitled. Those who are on legitimate claim must go to great lengths to prove their availability, capability, and desire to work. If this is not done, they are automatically subject to disqualification. In short, Mr. Speaker, it is not nearly as easy to get paid from unemployment insurance as most people think, unless of course the UIC is doing a sloppy job.

I have no doubt that in some cases they are doing a sloppy job. If somebody is drawing unemployment insurance illegally, that person should be charged. I have no objection to that whatever. But there are some people who think there is an unemployed bum under every bed in the nation, to paraphrase an expression which was once used with regard to communists. So, who is going to be most affected by the proposals to increase the entry requirements? I suggest it will be the low income, seasonal or part-time workers who must rely on temporary jobs because there simply are no full-time jobs to be had in the areas where they live. Members from the Atlantic provinces have said in the past that seasonal, short-term and part-time work is a way of life for many. Yet even in our industrial heartland there are relatively few jobs to be had.

In my own constituency of Brant, the latest figure I have from Canada Manpower is that 5,911 persons were unemployed at the end of May, less than a month ago. At the same time, the local Manpower office has a total of 266 jobs available, including both part-time and full-time. So there are

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5,911 persons chasing 266 jobs in an area of Canada which is supposed to be highly industrialized, with a great demand for workers. I do not know how the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) will sell his arguments in that area when he campaigns there in a few months.

Mr. Symes: Do you know something we don't know?

Mr. Blackburn: I will tell the hon. member later. Given that kind of ratio, it is obvious there are a lot of disgruntled people in an area which has a high standard of living and a high standard of job availability. The variable entrance requirement is another measure which erodes the original universal nature of the UIC program. There is no doubt that should this amendment pass, it will lead to instances where if two men employed in the same industry are hit by industry-wide layoffs, one may qualify for benefits while the other is denied any. I am speaking now of the geographic problem to which the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville referred a few minutes ago.

The New Democratic Party strongly opposes, on behalf of the unemployed of this country—those who are legitimately unemployed; we have no brief for those who try to rip off the system—any increase whatever in the minimum number of weeks to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits. The qualifying period can be altered and probably should be altered from time to time. I am not saying that the minimum qualifying period should be a hard and fast requirement continuing decade after decade, but I am suggesting that during very bad economic times, when hundreds of thousands of Canadians are suffering, as they are today, the eight-week qualifying period should remain as it is. If, in three or four years' time, unemployment decreases considerably, we could take a second look at the qualifying period and extend it to 12 weeks or 14 weeks, whatever is reasonable having regard to the state of the economy.

As far as regional distinctions are concerned, I am not sure what the minister means by "regions". I do not know what the distinction is under the act. If you were to take Atlantic Canada as a region, it would be totally unfair because Cape Breton Island, for example, has a much higher unemployment rate than other parts of Nova Scotia or parts of New Brunswick. Even if you take Nova Scotia as a region, I would point out there is very little relationship between unemployment in the Halifax area and on Cape Breton Island. I wish the minister would explain just how he would set up regions in relation to the qualifying period. As a matter of fact, one could almost establish separate regions in the larger metropolitan cities. If a person lives in east Toronto and cannot get work there and has to go to west Toronto, he has to travel 17 to 20 miles. This regionalism is something which has to be more clearly defined before we vote for or against this bill. Those are my brief remarks about clauses 29 and 30 which are encompassed under my name in motion No. 8. They also include motion No. 10 which is related to the qualifying period of eight or more weeks.