should be basic to any organized plan of insurance, unemployment or otherwise.

What would make far greater sense would be a formula for reducing, on a percentage basis, the amount of premiums paid by those who compile a steady and continuous employment record and who are thus proven to be low risks as potential claimants of benefits. Such a system, if implemented, would be far more equitable than the one we have at present, in that those whose contributions are most reliable—indeed, those who are most conscientious—would not be continually forced to carry those who are not. Admittedly, this would not eliminate all imbalances but it would certainly be a good deal fairer than the present scheme, especially in view of the fact that the government proposes to raise the premium payments of employees through the new benchmark proviso in Bill C-69.

In the same vein, there is need to look at retirement benefits under the unemployment insurance program. As it stands now, one who has been actively employed all his or her working life, one who has contributed the maximum amount in the way of premiums, has little to look forward to in the way of a deserved retirement award. It is time for an adequate retirement clause to be incorporated into the act so that this inequity may be rectified. This would be a welcome addition to Bill C-69.

The very fact that the government deemed it necessary to adjust the benchmark is in itself a self-admission of failure in its handling of the unemployment insurance program. Things have clearly got out of hand and determined action is needed to straighten out the situation. Unfortunately, we can see nothing in Bill C-69 toward this end. It is another case of pulling a drowning man out of the water, then tossing him in again without first teaching him how to swim.

I have already noted that because benefits are not sufficiently connected to employment records, and because benefit rate structures are so appealing, the tendency to a disincentive to work becomes apparent. This obvious shortcoming could be overcome, Mr. Speaker, by redefining the work week and the benefit structure. Where in Bill C-69 do we see a concrete proposal to abandon the work week in favour of a more reliable work year? Rather than calculating benefits on the basis of weekly insurable earnings, why not calculate them on a yearly basis? Initial eligibility need not be affected, but the initial benefit rate could be calculated on both earnings and the number of weeks employed in the previous year.

If an employee had worked a full year prior to a claim, then his benefit rate would be substantially higher than a worker who had a much shorter attachment to the labour force. This scheme would have the obvious advantage of providing work incentives and it would guarantee that the original insurance principles of unemployment insurance were upheld.

I do not wish to go on record, Mr. Speaker, as being opposed to all the provisions of Bill C-69. Some of these amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act may prove useful and are worthy of mention. They include, first, extension of the period during which a claim can be made and benefits received for those suffering temporary disability or those who are on special training courses and, second, extension of the time for claiming from 15 weeks to 25 for those entitled to sickness benefits.

● (1620)

It would have been equally constructive to tie maternity benefits to sickness benefits because of the difficulties and unfairness in the calculation of maternity benefits due to the use of the confinement date. I would suggest a set period for maternity benefits or, better still, including as a sickness claim the length, depending upon the doctor's estimate, of temporary disability.

With regard to the increase from three to six weeks of the period of disqualification for those who quit, are fired or refuse suitable employment, one hopes that this extended disqualification period will not only serve to differentiate between those who quit or are fired and those who are laid off or terminated for reasons beyond their control, but will also provide scope for more thorough investigation into the job search being conducted by claimants before they are allowed to collect any benefits at all.

It is a well known fact that many are receiving benefits who, although unemployed, are not conducting an honest job search. In some cases such claimants have no intention whatsoever of working. They are ripping off the system at the expense of honest taxpayers and are being allowed to get away with it. I know of cases where claimants have collected benefits for extended periods of time without ever being asked if they were conducting active job searches. For example, job search reports appear to be sent only to a random selection of claimants. Clearly, a more comprehensive investigative machinery is required. With six weeks available before some claims become payable, it is imperative that all such claimants prove to the Unemployment Insurance Commission that they are actively seeking employment. The burden of proof must be on the claimant, and the standard of proof must be raised.

One way in which this kind of reform can be more easily accomplished is through much further decentralization of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. Lack of decentralization has been one of the prime failings of the operation for many years, and I am indeed sorry that no definite amendments are present in Bill C-69 relating to this problem.

I believe that greater understanding between UIC officers and individual claimants, most of whose claims are perfectly legitimate, could be achieved through decentralization. Similarly, there can be no doubt concerning the need for higher quality performance at all levels. Such an undertaking, that is, decentralization, could also offer additional impetus to the promotion of relocation of those among the unemployed who find it impossible to locate work within their own area or territory.

The commission must be encouraged to develop more uniformity in its decisions. Most members of parliament deal with a great many UIC cases and most are acutely aware of the tragic lack of uniformity which mars the performance of most offices. I do not refer simply to the lack of uniformity between offices, but within offices as well. There is a multitude of unfortunate cases on record in which identical claims were processed in differing manners and the outcome of the claims differed considerably. While I have emphasized that more vigilance must be