

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the house to a somewhat similar case. This concerns a married woman, a widow with three children aged eight to fifteen. She had earned \$85 a week for 4 years as the manager of a firm. Following a change in administration, she was fired. So she went to a manpower centre. After waiting a month, she was offered work at \$35 a week. Try as she might to explain that she cannot think for a second of making both ends meet on \$35 a week, that she could not possibly take that job, she is outlawed, she no longer receives unemployment insurance benefits. She goes before the board, which again rules against her. She tries to appeal to Ottawa and there again, the district office denies her permission to appeal.

That is nonsense to me and I should like the responsible department to deal with problems such as this one. I maintain that it should be easy enough to settle it, as the Unemployment Insurance Commission has all the personnel it needs. I believe it could be solved by appointing to the pay office the employees who are good collectors and to the collection office, the ones who pay badly. The whole problem would be solved overnight.

Now, all decisions of that kind are not always made in a natural way. I believe some officials of the Unemployment Insurance Commission come to decisions for fear of being short of money. They realize there is not much left in the Unemployment Insurance Fund. A mere look at the Montreal area would convince anybody of that. When we consider that there were 67,771 unemployed in January 1968, it is obvious that this is disheartening for the workers, for those who are waiting for their benefits. It is also disheartening for the commission employees. They are overburdened with work and it is difficult for them to answer everyone, for they are unable to do all that work from one week to the other. It is only natural that unfair decisions should be made in some cases.

● (2:50 p.m.)

There is the case of another person in the Montreal region, a Canadian citizen who had been working for two years in an ironworks plant. One can imagine what happened there. As soon as road construction slowed down, this man was fired. That happened on January 6. A few days later, he received a letter which said:

We have examined your benefit application. According to the information obtained, you are ineligible for benefits under sections 146 to 148 of

[Mr. Godin.]

the unemployment insurance regulations, and payments will therefore be suspended as from January 7, 1968.

It was easy to suspend payments since he had never received any. This worker was fired on the morning of the 6th; he went to the manpower centre in the afternoon of the same day. His case had already been examined on January 7, and he had been struck off the list. It was done quite quickly and easily. He has come to the manpower centre every week since then. We are now in the middle of February, and he has not yet touched a penny. In my opinion, this is very unjust, because a person who is unemployed needs that money.

I notice that when public servants want to be pleasant, they can. For example, the members who are paid \$18,000 a year were supposed to get their mid-December pay on the last day of the month, the 31st, but they received it ten days earlier, on the 21st. We, members of the house, who get \$18,000 a year, are paid a week and a half in advance, but those who lose their jobs have to wait month and a half to get a scanty \$30 a week.

Mr. Speaker, I would like such matters to be taken into consideration. I understand that the problem nowadays is one of automation, but we are moving in a vicious circle. We are taking money out of the pockets of those who are lucky enough to still have a job, in order to give it to those who are unlucky and do not have a job any more, but both, the working man and the unemployed, have less and less money to spend in stores. Therefore, stocks are building up in warehouses, manufacturers are laying off more employees. We are moving in a vicious circle and we do not seem to be willing to find a way out of it. From one day to the next, the gap grows wider between the purchasing power and the large supply of goods for sale.

If there are so many unemployed while stores are chock full of goods, it is because production plays its role very well, and with fewer employees at that. It is obvious that everyone should be able to do his share of work in the national production. The whole system must be restructured, first of all by reducing the hours of work. The industrialist who now has three shifts working eight hours a day, for a continuous 24-hour production, should consider, it seems to me, hiring a fourth shift and have everyone work six hours a day. That alone would mean that 50 per cent of all the unemployed in the land would be rehired in one fell swoop.