

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

There is some sense there in that political party". I have now discovered that nothing at all has been done about it.

I imagine there are other speakers in the House who might be interested in saying a few words about the entrant and re-entrant to the labour force category and how unfair the unemployment insurance system is. I say that especially when someone can walk into the Unemployment Insurance office today only to be told that his claim is under review. There is no procedure whereby that person can actually sit down and go over the decision not to pay benefits. One can go through the appeal process but that can take up to a year and a half.

I am sure there are other Members who might wish to express an opinion on that matter, especially the Hon. Member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception (Mr. Johnson) who has approximately the same type of constituency problems as I have in terms of unemployment insurance.

Mr. Johnson: Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the Hon. Member for Gander—Twillingate (Mr. Baker) for what he said. I would say that the silliness about which he was talking should be quadrupled. Some of the regulations in the Unemployment Insurance Act are silly, silly, silly, silly. I am surprised that this administration which has done so many good things since it took office three years ago has not been more determined to bring in more legislation than what is contained in the Bill before us. Although I am glad to see that people in certain regions of the country will still be able to qualify for unemployment insurance with only 10 weeks contributions, in my particular riding, there are many people who are not even fortunate enough to be able to find work to get 10 weeks to qualify for unemployment insurance.

● (1200)

The Hon. Member for Gander—Twillingate (Mr. Baker) has already alluded to the situation of Manpower seats in trade schools, and so on. I think that it is absolutely ridiculous that some people can qualify to have their seat paid for and receive a certain weekly fee to attend training, and that more people cannot qualify at all. For instance, some employers are willing to continue to pay wages if the employees are attending school to take certain mandatory courses. Another example is, people going to sea who have to have marine emergency duty courses, and the employer will continue to pay their wages. However, these persons have to pay for the seats in a trade school, in the fisheries college, or the employer has to pay it for them. There are people who have had their seats paid for and are receiving unemployment insurance at the same time. I think that that is wrong and it should be looked into. I am glad that the Hon. Member for Gander-Twillingate mentioned it. It is time that Parliament took a serious look at the unemployment insurance regulations.

The Hon. Member for Gander-Twillingate mentioned that people have to appeal to Revenue Canada. Officials in the Unemployment Insurance Commission will advise people that they are eligible for unemployment insurance benefits, and

then a ruling will come from Revenue Canada that states that they are not eligible. In some cases, it takes weeks or months for someone to find out if they are eligible or not.

I know of one person who had worked for years, was laid off, and applied for unemployment insurance benefits. It took so long to get his claim processed before it went to appeal, and then it went to a court hearing, which only occurs in the maritime and Atlantic provinces once a year. That person missed the 90-day period and could not get in to be heard. In the process he lost his house because he could not make the mortgage payments. That is downright shameful.

I noticed that the Hon. Member for Gander-Twillingate was not partisan, as he usually is, because he blamed it on parliamentarians more so than the Government. I think that it does rest with the parliamentarians, because we should see that the Government makes some changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act.

The Forget Commission made some recommendations that are probably acceptable in some areas of Canada, but are highly unacceptable in other areas. The same thing applies to unemployment insurance for fishermen. The Hon. Member knows that practically all the witnesses who appeared before the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans did not wish any changes made to the Unemployment Insurance Act, because they were afraid of what might be put in place.

Until such time as the Government is willing to set out a course and advise the people that this is what it would like to implement, and ask if they are willing to accept it, the people will be afraid of changes in unemployment insurance. They are afraid that the changes might be for the worse instead of for the better.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak to this Bill. As a new Member looking at this Bill it looks pretty dry. In a way, it is a very simple Bill. It states that we will change the words "twenty-one" to "thirty-three". I do not think that anyone has risen in the House to speak against the Bill. I also rise to support the Bill and the changes in the Act. I wish to take the opportunity to change these cold, plain words and put some flesh and blood into the debate.

As has been pointed out, the mere fact that the Government needs to continue this provision in the Act underscores and underlines the great problem that we have with unemployment in particular parts of Canada. As a Newfoundlander and as the Member for St. John's East, I must pay particular attention to the problems in Newfoundland.

At this time of year in Newfoundland many people are very worried. They are not so much worried about finding permanent jobs, but that they will not be able to get enough work to get unemployment insurance in order to survive the winter. Whether they do or not is the difference for is the difference between unemployment insurance and welfare. That is not a very good choice for an individual in a country that is as