

Unemployment Insurance Act

she came to her MP. It turns out that the UIC was prepared to back up the three-week disqualification. By the time we got to the hearing, following several telephone calls, something like four weeks or a month and a half had elapsed and finally the UIC backed off its three-week disqualification.

I ask, Mr. Speaker, is this the kind of justice that is handed out by the commission and the department? The UIC is supposed to be the agency that helps workers who have lost their job or who have refused their job or quit it for good reason. In this case we were successful and won. I know of several other instances where the three-week disqualification was applied, and it took a long period of time, going all the way from Belleville to Ottawa, back to Belleville to the local office, before we got any action at all. I point out that 70 per cent of those on unemployment insurance earn less than \$6,000 a year, so that all during that period of time while this process is gone through, these people have to keep looking for work to support themselves. They get no benefit from unemployment insurance for which they have contributed.

The minister has made much of the fact that 250,000 quit their jobs in 1974. Taken out of context, that seems like lot of people, but we must keep in mind the total work force. With a total work force of nine million people, 250,000 is about 2.5 per cent. The minister has also made a great deal of fuss about the 21,000 people who refused jobs. That is less than 1 per cent of all unemployment insurance claimants and less than 0.25 per cent of the total work force. This gives us a proper perspective of the extent of this problem.

What is even more important about the people who have refused jobs or quit jobs is this. The minister has not said much about this and his nabobs in the bureaucracy have not shed much light on the matter. What is the reason that the bulk of the persons quit their jobs? Did they do so without just cause? The Canada Manpower centre in Sudbury referred workers to Denison Mines at Elliot Lake where it has been proven safety conditions are not up to the standards demanded by Atomic Energy of Canada. There we have working conditions that no worker would be anxious to experience. Conditions in the mines are such that the very lives of the workers are threatened. As a result, the workers referred to Denison Mines by the Canada Manpower centre refused the job, and they are reflected in the figure of 21,000. I do not blame them for that, Mr. Speaker. Workers who refuse to work in such conditions, or in asbestos mines where safety conditions are not up to scratch, are reflected in the 21,000 and are cut off from unemployment insurance. We have appealed such cases and lost, because the commission said, in effect, that since other workers are working in the mines these people should take the job.

The minister has not given us any breakdown of these figures showing why people quit or refuse jobs. Who are they, how many are women, how many are men, how many are in the low income brackets without skills? When throwing around a figure like 250,000 or 21,000 we have to see what kind of people the minister is talking about. Instead, the minister assumes in his sweeping statement that these people are lazy, good for nothings, that they are not interested in working at all. That is what he is infer-

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

ring and it is why he has brought in clause 16. This is also why we cannot support it. We think the government has to give us additional information.

In this economy of ours there is much mobility. When workers in a low paying job want to try and improve themselves, it seems to me this is a pretty good reason for quitting. One would think that if the government really wanted to improve working conditions and pay, they would raise the federal minimum wage. It is sadly lagging behind the industrial wage. What do they do? They bring in this kind of clause, so how is the worker to defend himself against disqualification for quitting without just cause? That is a pretty difficult defence. How does he defend himself against disqualification for being fired for misconduct? In these days the discriminations are not obvious.

● (1740)

The hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) pointed out some of the problems. From my experience with unemployment insurance problems I have found that when it comes to a question of believing the employer or the employee, invariably the weight of the argument is always in favour of the employer. This is especially so if the employee is a young person, has a beard, has dishevelled hair and is not dressed in a suit and tie. The weight of the argument is also always slanted against the claimant if she happens to be a woman, and particularly if she happens to have two children at home. Right away, a certain concept flashes through the mind of the benefit control officer. I have had this experience at first-hand. I have knowledge of this and have seen it happen up close.

What the minister is doing by putting in this kind of clause is making those who work in very poor conditions for low wages think twice about quitting and trying to move to something better. It seems to me they will lack that mobility we have been able to give them. What we are doing for some of the worst employers in this country is guaranteeing them a pool of low-paid workers who will be stuck with poor working conditions.

Let me remind the minister that those in this country who work for less than \$6,000 a year now make up 70 per cent of the unemployed. We cannot support the minister's clause, and that is why we have brought forward this amendment.

Let me say to the minister that he should first investigate his appeal procedure and the administration of this part of the act. If he can then assure us that the claimants will be dealt with in a just and fair manner, he can come back to this House and ask for a ten-week disqualification period for quitting the job and we might support him. We will support the minister to the hilt, but he should not sell us a pig-in-a-poke, telling us to do this, until he does what I suggest.

[Translation]

Mr. Charles-Eugène Dionne (Kamouraska): Mr. Speaker, I often had the opportunity to see the difficulties of the unemployed, mostly because of disqualification and I will express some views concerning the usual method of the UIC officers.

As I said, we should change the legislation to give to well intentioned civil servants the possibility to better under-