

that more specifically later in my remarks. The third reason is that this government stubbornly refuses to recognize any deficiencies in the Unemployment Insurance Act or any need for amendment. Fourth, the interim report of the Unemployment Insurance Advisory Committee points out the need for some changes.

I wish to quote from the bottom of page 2 of the interim Unemployment Insurance Advisory Committee report of April 16 of this year:

—the Committee strongly recommends that the Unemployment Insurance Commission pursue vigorously closer cooperation and coordination with all other manpower placement agencies.

I will refer to that later. Finally, from the large number of complaints I have received, I would say this is an important issue. I have received complaints from farmers in my area, groups of farmers, organizations, tobacco farmers, orchard owners, berry growers, asparagus and tomato growers, all employers who consistently employ seasonal agricultural labour.

My experience in this field as an owner and, therefore, employer of this type of labour, leads me to one conclusion, namely that there are many serious deficiencies in the Unemployment Insurance Act as it now stands. I wish to examine in some detail the defects that I see in the unemployment insurance program. First, I think there is a built-in disincentive to work. I think I can best illustrate that by quoting from the brief to which I have referred. It was prepared by members of the Norfolk County Council and is entitled, "Agricultural Labour Shortage". Persons and organizations which contributed to this brief give it considerable merit and importance. They are as follows: Norfolk Federation of Agriculture, Norfolk Milk Committee, Norfolk Fruit Growers Association, Norfolk Canning & Crop Growers, Norfolk Soil and Crop Improvement Association, Strawberry Growers Association and Ontario Flue-Cured Tobacco Growers Marketing Board. I think their remarks and suggestions deserve attention. With regard to the Unemployment Insurance Commission, we find this on page 2 of their brief:

It has filled a real need in the past and continues to do so.

This indicates they do not condemn it out of hand.

But there are serious faults with the system. The first is the short qualifying period of eight weeks. In our interviews we found time after time that workers would only put in eight weeks of labour at any one place, to satisfy the qualification required by the Unemployment Insurance Act, after which they seem to have no difficulty in obtaining their unemployment insurance allotments.

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Therefore we find it absolutely expedient to increase this qualification period to as much as 30 weeks. Labour in the agricultural community generally starts in mid-April and continues until the end of November. Any able-bodied worker would have no problem in accumulating the required number of work weeks to qualify for unemployment insurance, to which we feel an agricultural worker has a right, just like any other worker, but it should only be a right, not a way of life.

I am not inflexible as to the number of weeks they should work. The question is open to discussion. The brief suggests 30 weeks; others think it should be 20 weeks. I agree we should not take as a criterion one local area where seasonal agricultural labour is perhaps used to a maximum extent. The period should be based on experience across the country. But I still feel eight weeks is far

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too short a period, for the reasons I have stated. When this bill was being considered in the standing committee our party asserted strongly that the qualifying period was too short, and that it would constitute a disincentive to Canadians. We were laughed out of countenance and told we were casting aspersions upon Canadian workmen who would not act in this manner. However, experience has proven we were right, and this is one of the things which needs to be changed in the Unemployment Insurance Act.

Another factor which has brought the act into question in the area I represent is the mass disentitlement of seasonal agricultural workers on the somewhat flimsy ground that they were not actively seeking work. At the time this allegation was levelled against them there simply was no work available in the area, so it was nonsense to say they were not seeking work. I have argued this question before, in debate and during the question period. People were disqualified on a mass scale at the time the numbers of benefit control officers was so greatly increased; they seemed to descend most heavily on areas in which a great deal of seasonal agricultural work was carried on. This has been responsible for a string of letters, telephone calls and personal calls to me. The workers resent the treatment accorded to them. They feel that since deductions were taken from their pay they were entitled to benefit. One can try to explain why such is not necessarily the case, but that is the attitude the workers take. They go further. They say that if no benefits are paid them after they have contributed to the scheme, they will work no more at seasonal work. This may be a wrong stand to take, but it is a fact of life. This is what the farmers are being told in my area when they try to recruit labour, and the effect on agriculture is serious.

Another problem arises from the over-payment of benefits and a method by which the Commission recovers overpayments. In almost all cases, overpayments occur through an error on the part of the Commission itself, that is, by officials who administer the scheme. This, they frankly admit. First, the recipient of benefit gets a yellow slip from the Commission to the effect that his claim has been examined and he is entitled to benefit for a certain number of weeks at a certain number of dollars a week. Then, at the end of a further period, a letter may come from the Commission saying, in effect: We are sorry, but we made a mistake; you are retroactively disqualified from benefit and you owe us X dollars.

In many cases, of course, the cheques have already been cashed and spent on the necessities of life. The recipient may then be called upon to repay as much as \$500, \$600, or even, in one case which has come to my notice, \$1600. The Commission has, of course, the right in law to recover this money, despite the fact that payments may have been made in error. Most of the people concerned are able, eventually, to repay the money. Others are unable to pay the money back. All this has created a bad impression as to the way in which the Act is administered, and it is a further disincentive to work in the type of occupation I am describing.

To add insult to injury, the UIC not only demands repayment of benefits, but it also asks the recipients to pay back the equivalent of the income tax which was deducted on behalf of the Department of National Reve-