

*Committee Reports*

Recently I had a case in my own constituency where a worker finally got a job and got back on his feet. Then the first thing the Unemployment Insurance Commission did was to seize his salary to collect the moneys which the UI had overpaid to him because it had made a mistake.

• (1530)

We can all understand claiming those moneys back from a worker who intentionally misled the Government or who put down false information, but the committee is not talking about that. The committee is talking about cases where the Unemployment Insurance Commission makes a mistake, overpays and then harshly tries to claim moneys back without any reasonable term of payment or whatever against the unemployed worker.

There were 90 recommendations made by the committee. Those are some of the major ones relating to unemployment insurance and part-time workers, unemployment insurance with respect to maternity and child care benefits, unemployment insurance with respect to job training while a person is unemployed, unemployment insurance with respect to workers who are put out of work through strikes and lock-outs, and unemployment insurance as it relates to overpayments and the collection of them.

Some recommendations also relate to the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Commission and how the commission can be made a more effective and efficient operation.

Since this report in March, 1987, Members in the Opposition have time and again put questions to the Government asking if it would move on certain recommendations of that report, but the Government has always refused. The Government appointed the Forget Commission but did nothing about its recommendations. We recognize that three of the recommendations of Forget were rejected by the parliamentary committee. The Forget Commission recommended that we do away with regionally extended benefits and benefits for fishermen. We rejected those recommendations and also rejected Mr. Forget's recommendations that UI benefits be calculated on an annualization formula, which is a complex one, and which would have resulted in extremely low benefits for unemployed workers, benefits which would not allow them to pay the required rent and costs for families. We rejected those major recommendations of the Forget Commission.

By the way, I said earlier that Forget had made 35 recommendations. I was wrong. He made 53 recommendations. Our committee made 90. While we rejected several of Forget's key recommendations, there were many recommendations in common between the Forget Commission report and the report of the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration.

Despite the fact that this report of the committee was unanimous, Conservative Members included, and despite the fact that many of the recommendations were in common with

the Forget Commission report, the Government did nothing. The Government is the one that said that something had to be done in November, 1984. The Government is the one that said we must set up this Royal commission to re-examine the unemployment insurance system to make it more effective, but it did nothing.

Just this year, because all of a sudden a specific case came to our attention with respect to maternity leave and child care, the Government made a very small amendment. In that case it is a typical example of this Government, that it will do nothing until we get a flagrant abuse of a system and then it is dragged kicking and shouting to make a reform that was necessary. In that case, Mr. Speaker, you will remember the case of one young mother who died giving birth to a baby. The father felt he had to leave work to take care of the newborn baby because the mother had died, but because he was the father he was denied unemployment insurance. Only the mother would have been allowed unemployment insurance to take care of the baby for the 15 weeks following the birth. This young man was a worker. By the way, he was a trucker, I believe. We have had the problems of truckers presented to the House in the last few days. However, because this father was not working as a trucker during his absence he lost his salary and could not collect unemployment insurance although he was taking care of a newborn baby as a result of his wife having died giving birth.

That individual case caused so much controversy that finally the Government did bring in a Bill just to correct that one instance. A year previous to that the Standing Committee saw that kind of problem and recommended that child care benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act be considered for both father and mother, that either one should be able to receive those benefits if necessary to take care of a child, but the Government did nothing until we got the case to which I have just referred. Then the change was made because there was an uproar in the country and people felt that something had to be done.

These problems have not been resolved. In a recent case that went to the Federal Court of Canada, again with respect to maternity leave and child care benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act, Mr. Justice Strayer of the Federal Court said that the Unemployment Insurance Act is:

—shot through with arbitrary distinctions—

He said that several of its provisions were discriminatory. Mr. Justice Strayer recommended that certain corrections be made. I asked a question a few weeks ago of the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mrs. McDougall) as to whether she would take action and correct these ambiguities in the law and introduce some of the recommendations of the unanimous committee report. She said she would not do that. She said she was waiting for the written judgment of Mr. Justice Strayer which she said she expected shortly.