

Employment and Immigration

telephone which results in a decision by an insurance officer to cut off benefits.

I see the hon. member for Parry Sound has come into the House. He should join with me in this because for purposes of unemployment insurance benefits his riding will become part of region 21. I am sure he will have something to say.

An hon. Member: Don't hold your breath.

Mr. Rodriguez: Considering where he sits in the House, I will not. One of the facts we were able to obtain from the bureaucrats was that the average number of weeks of unemployment insurance benefits collected last year was 17. Looking at the provincial breakdown, we find a high correlation between those parts of Canada that are consistently plagued by high unemployment. In other words, that average tends to be exceeded in Newfoundland, Atlantic Canada and parts of Quebec where we know already there are regional disparities and high unemployment. In effect, what the Economic Council of Canada said is backed up by statistical information based on those who collected benefits last year in the parts of Canada where records were kept. It seems to me the Economic Council of Canada has said that now is not the time to tamper with the Unemployment Insurance Act as it relates to participation time and the length of time benefits can be collected.

I have suggested a way in which the minister can properly administer the act to ensure that where people are ripping it off, proper controls can be imposed. We suggested that if certain groups were suspected of this, computers could be used to segregate them and subject them to benefit control. People could be referred to jobs. If a Manpower centre maintains that jobs are available in Atlantic Canada, then it should refer people to those jobs, and if they do not take them they should be cut off benefits. Surely, that is the message that comes out of this piece of garbage that was put before members of the committee. Surely, if jobs are available, people should be referred to them.

Now we are putting Humpty-Dumpty together again by putting UIC and Manpower together. It is claimed they had been working closely together before. But why did Manpower officers not refer the unemployed to jobs? If they refuse the jobs, then a report could be made, an investigation launched and a decision made with respect to benefits. But to say there are lots of jobs in Atlantic Canada, and that there is no reason why people cannot get eight weeks of work there, is irresponsible. I can see the picture—two groups of bureaucrats fighting for the minister's head and ear. If we were in Spain, they would get something else as well.

We have pointed out how these proposals will drastically affect parts of Canada where it is difficult to get employment. For example, at the moment, if a worker is on major attachment he must put in 20 weeks or more of work. Then after the twenty-first week there is a two-week waiting period before benefits start. This is to be changed and benefits will be paid after the twenty-sixth week and there will be one week of benefits for every week of work. Twenty weeks' work will produce 20 weeks of benefits. But if a worker qualifies in

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

terms of the national rate, he can draw benefits beyond that period, and after that may be transferred horizontally to the welfare program.

This is going to be discriminatory legislation, Mr. Speaker. I have had a great deal of experience with the unemployment insurance office in my riding and have discovered that those who honestly try to administer the act have difficulty because it is so complicated. Imagine what it will be like when 54 regions are imposed and the phasing-in period begins. I recall when the new act came into effect in 1971. By 1972 my office was handling 30 to 50 cases every day. We sent hundreds of cases to the central office for resolution of local administrative problems. The local officers were not at fault, because the act calls for many subjective decisions and there are no clear guidelines.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I have to interrupt the hon. member as his allotted time has expired. Is there consent for him to continue?

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not know whether the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) received an answer to his question, but there has been some discussion and I believe there is general agreement that a vote on motion No. 15 would deal with motions Nos. 15, 29 and 32, and a vote on motion No. 11 would deal with No. 30 as well.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Mr. Alexander: That is agreeable to us, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It is understood and accepted by all hon. members that a vote on motion No. 11 would also dispose of motion No. 30, and a vote on motion No. 15 would also dispose of motions Nos. 20 and 32. Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, I should like to express to the minister my dismay at the approach he is taking to reduce the number of benefits payable under the unemployment insurance scheme. I always find it difficult to understand why the department advances the theory that if we reduce payable benefits the unemployed somehow will be encouraged to seek work. Would it not be more logical, considering this country's high unemployment levels, levels which persist in Atlantic Canada, Quebec, parts of northern Ontario and elsewhere year after year, to determine first if the jobs are actually available? We should do this first before arguing that you need to tighten the unemployment insurance scheme, reduce benefits and thus give people greater incentive to look for work.

● (1230)

No matter how much you tighten the unemployment insurance plan, if the jobs are not there, people cannot work. I