

would be required to seek work in other fields during those months when they cannot work in construction.

● (1820)

I am not questioning the bricklayers' belief that working conditions are not adequate during winter months. Only an investigation of conditions could determine the validity of their concerns. However, assuming that their concerns are valid, I am anxious to be reassured that adequate checks are being made to determine that claimants covered by hiring hall agreements are actively pursuing work in other fields during those winter months. I believe that any investigation by departmental officials should address these questions.

If one accepts the builders' belief that working conditions are acceptable, then there appears to be no adequate reason that these jobs are going unfilled, and benefits should be cut off to anyone not accepting the work offered. The Chairman of the Emergency Manpower Committee set up by the Toronto Home-Builders Association has stated that if even all 1,400 of the individuals now collecting benefits reported for work, there would still be a shortfall.

These jobs are not just statistical figments of someone's imagination. They are very real, and the current housing boom has made builders desperate to locate skilled workers. The jobs are there. The labour to fill the positions is and should be available, yet jobs go vacant. This is a major problem which needs to be resolved before taxpayers are asked to pay out one more dime in benefits.

It must be determined if working conditions are acceptable or not. If they are not acceptable, then I would like assurances that adequate measures will be put in place to determine that claimants are actively seeking other employment during the winter months. If conditions are found to be acceptable, then I request an immediate stop to benefits for anyone found unwilling to accept work. Should the problem prove to be one of communication between the builders and the hiring halls, then installation of an effective communications system should be a first priority.

The integrity and credibility of the entire unemployment insurance system in Canada is at stake. Taxpayers have been asked for an ever increasing share of their hard-earned dollars over the years to finance the program. All that is asked in return is that those dollars be effectively directed to those who are willing and able to work but cannot find it. If funds continue to be directed to individuals who do not work by choice, the entire system cannot help but fall into further disrepute.

Since its inception, the Unemployment Insurance Commission has helped millions of Canadians to stay afloat until they were able to get back on their feet and working. However, financial resources are limited, and it has become increasingly important to ensure that available resources are directed only to those who are genuinely deserving of assistance. It should be

Adjournment Debate

remembered that unemployment insurance is an insurance against loss of job income and is designed to bridge the gap between one position and another, and it should be treated as such.

While I expect the Minister's investigation will deal with these immediate problems, I look forward to the report of the Forget Commission to address the wider range of problems which plague the Unemployment Insurance Commission. While the unemployment insurance system must remain flexible in order to accommodate compassionate circumstances, we must be rigid in our efforts to prevent abuse. I look forward to the reply of the Parliamentary Secretary. I am sure it will shed significant light on the problems I have outlined.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Guy Hudon (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for External Relations): Mr. Speaker, you should say the Parliamentary Secretary speaking for other Parliamentary Secretaries who are at the convention in Montreal.

Mr. Speaker, I am happy to reply to the question asked by my hon. colleague, especially as I worked in this Department for nearly a year. All Canadians, as well, naturally, as the Unemployment Insurance Commission and the Department of Employment and Immigration, recognize the collective agreements between labour and management which are at the basis of certain general working or hiring conditions. In this particular case, the employers had agreed to make job offers through the union hiring offices. Thus, the workers under the jurisdiction of a designated union hiring office are exempt from registering at the employment centre for periods of employment of up to sixteen weeks, and this is the cause of the problem.

In the Toronto region, 1,400 bricklayers have applied for unemployment insurance benefits. On the other hand, there are three union hiring offices to facilitate the placement of workers. According to these offices they are having problems referring workers because of a shortage of bricklayers in their sector.

Four employers when to the Canada Employment Centre to fill vacancies. Beginning on February 24, 1986, all CEC's in the Hamilton and Oshawa regions started to contact their clients with bricklaying skills. Those who refuse a job without a valid reason will have their entitlement reviewed.

On March 7, Department officials visited the three union hiring offices in the Toronto region to ensure compliance with the terms of the agreements signed with the union.

These offices of the Bricklayers' International Union are keeping to the terms of the agreement between the Commission and the hiring offices. However, the Commission is also checking to see whether the independent union of bricklayers is complying with its agreement.