

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

As people have indicated this has been suggested by various groups to committees in the past. To end on that point I want to say that the unemployment insurance rules are hard enough. I know that they are abused sometimes. Whenever they are, of course, people are quick to remind us, as they should, that it is unfair that they are working for low wages sometimes while another person is taking advantage of the rules and so on and is collecting unemployment insurance when they should not be. I appreciate that position and sometimes it is accurate.

However, we cannot generalize and say that those people who are unemployed are so by their own design. I say that because in just about 100 per cent of the cases people who are unemployed are on unemployment because they cannot find employment.

I had a case this week in which my office went to defend a person before an arbitration panel. It was a case of an unemployed worker in my constituency who wanted to get back into the workforce. What this worker did is he went out on his own to follow a training course which would then guarantee him a position. Interestingly enough, the training course is with a Crown corporation. Once this training course of 15 weeks or so is over, then he will have a full-time position. This training course that he is taking is for four hours per day. He has now been disqualified from UIC because he is unavailable for work, but he is unavailable for work because he is training so that he can get a job.

Does that make sense? It does not make any sense at all to me. That is why we went to defend the case. I am quite sure that in this particular case we will win because the decision that was originally given, as far as I am concerned, is ludicrous.

Those are the kinds of things that workers face sometimes. My same constituent could very well have been taking a course sponsored by UIC, being paid by UIC to take it, as well as receiving a little money on the side to pay for transportation to and from the course, but he did not ask for anything. He went out on his own, to get this training course in order to get a full-time position, which he is going to get in a few weeks from now. If he had done nothing at all, if he had just sat around, he could have collected benefits for a long number of weeks. My constituent did not want that; he wanted to go back to work, but the system in this case has penalized him.

I bring this to the attention of Hon. Members to give an example of how difficult it is for people who are on unemployment, and how rules that are obviously designed to make things better sometimes do the exact opposite of what there were intended to do.

I say to the Parliamentary Secretary and to the Government that if the Government had this 10-week rule in place 100 per cent of the time the system would still not be perfect. However in my opinion it would be at least a small step toward making

it more fair for Canadians. Therefore I ask my colleagues to accept this amendment.

Mr. Baker: Mr. Chairman, just for the official record I want to point out that in order to collect unemployment insurance one has to prove that one is available for work. One has to prove that. One has to prove it sometimes over and over when a call is received from Unemployment Insurance Commission investigators who have been hired by the Government. One has to prove that one is available for work.

In other words, availability means that one has to be available at one's place of residence. One must be available to travel. One must be available to go wherever the job is. If one is offered a job or finds a job, then one's unemployment is cut off. Not only that, but everything one received has to be paid back because automatically the charge is then made by the commission that one was not available for work last week if one was not available for work this week, or if one is not available when one started to draw. One has to prove one's availability. If one is offered a job one has to accept it or one's unemployment is cut off and one is asked to pay back everything.

One cannot quit one's job just to collect unemployment insurance because as you know, Mr. Chairman, one is then penalized six weeks, plus two weeks waiting. That is two months. I do not know of anybody who can live on fresh air or water if one has any water—and some communities do not have any water to drink.

Someone might say that that person could go to welfare. If one goes to welfare one might end up in jail. What does one do if one qualifies for unemployment insurance and one goes to welfare? The first thing one has to do is one must sign a form. One says in that form that when one receives one's unemployment insurance the welfare department will be paid back what has been received. It does not only apply to unemployment insurance. It applies to Canada pension, Canada pension disability, old age pension—it applies to anything one gets from the Government. Then one signs another form that states that in accepting the money from welfare—I call it welfare, it is social assistance in some places, I suppose, but welfare is the term that we know on the coastline of Newfoundland—one may now be guilty of neglect if one has a family or people to support because one has quit one's job.

That normally results in a jail sentence. There are thousands of cases every year of people who end up in jail because they quit their job. They have to wait the eight weeks for unemployment insurance that they cannot prove to the Unemployment Insurance Commission because they were working in the woods. They cannot prove there was no roof over their heads. We have had cases like this. He is not fed any food so the guy decides to quit and go home. In signing the form for welfare he ends up in jail. It is pretty difficult when one is in jail because then one cannot collect unemployment insurance at all.