

Unemployment Insurance Act

cheats represented .2 per cent of the total number of beneficiaries in that year. That is a very low number.

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If the Government wanted to change the system to make positive changes, then it should not punish the majority of honest, hard-working men and women who want to work, need to work, and need the protection if some unforeseen problems arise. Furthermore, employers should not be punished after they are invited to be good corporate citizens by hiring as many people as they possibly can. Do not ask partners in this social contract to pick up the whole tab after the Government has enjoyed the fruits of their labour.

For instance, in London, the new regulations indicate that a person who loses a job through no fault of their own will have to work longer to qualify, will receive fewer benefits, and will receive those benefits for a shorter period of time. That is not fair and equitable to honest working men and women, especially at a time when there will be massive changes due to the Free Trade Agreement, and as companies restructure. These proposed changes are punitive and discriminatory to honest working men and women.

The Government insists that it is shuffling money from unemployment to training, and that some \$800 million will go to training and retraining. The Government's new found responsibility and interest in training is truly amazing. After cutting training and retraining programs by \$700 million in the last four years, it is now putting back what it took from those programs over the past five years.

Did Canadian workers not need training in the past four years? Did employers not need skilled workers over the past four years? The Government wants to take from the unemployed, and it wants all workers and employers to pay for the training programs without having to give any assurances that they themselves will benefit from that training.

Where has the Government been for five years? Waiting lists for training and apprenticeship programs have ballooned, while government funding has dried up. Employers have had severe problems finding skilled workers, yet welfare rolls in most municipalities have

remained high. All this is at great economic and social cost to society. Where has the federal Government been for those people? Where has the Government been for older workers when their plants were closed down with no adjustment programs? Stringent requirements were needed to qualify for retraining, yet few spots were available in any case. Most people found themselves at the bottom of a long waiting list.

A strong labour force development strategy depends on a sound and full employment policy. That includes not only strong emphasis on training, retraining and worker adjustment programs, but on strong support for research and development, education, and literacy programs for our people. Unfortunately, all those positive steps have been cut back by the Government in the past, or have little token support now.

The Government should not move on its unemployment insurance plan as it is now written, nor should Parliament approve this Bill until such time as the Government has tabled the boundaries for the new labour force economic regions. There are indications that those new boundaries will not be ready in time and that there are certain to be inequities.

Second, the new training programs that government Members speak of have not been tabled, nor have there been any consultations with the provinces. These changes will likely result in shifting additional financial burden to the provinces and in turn to municipalities at a time when we should be looking at ways to make the three levels of government more efficient and co-operative in a collective manner in order to make the maximum use of all moneys collected by way of taxes from our citizens.

If the Government wants to introduce positive changes to unemployment insurance, benefit packages to improve its effectiveness, and if the Government wants to introduce measures that will improve the special benefits for maternity and paternity leave, sick benefits and old age benefits, we on this side of the House will look favourably upon those changes. However, if the Government insists on dismantling and cutting down one of the most important social pillars of a country that has reached our level of maturity and social well-being, then we will have absolutely no part of it.