

Unemployment Insurance Act

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): Order, please. I would just like to remind the hon. member that his remarks should be addressed to the Chair and not to members on the opposite side of the House.

Mr. Parent: I apologize, Madam Speaker, and I will see to it that all my remarks are addressed to you or through you to hon. members opposite, and I hope you will accept that apology. I trust you will not put a stop watch on me.

How is a person affected emotionally when he is out of work for a long period of time? The traditional role of the man in our society, and I say this knowing that this is women's year and that a large number of wives work, is as the breadwinner and head of the family. A reversal of the roles, that is, the wife being responsible for the family and its upkeep for a long period of time, can in some cases seriously affect the emotional balance of the unemployment insurance claimant, particularly when benefits run out.

● (1750)

The only alternative is welfare, the latter being particularly applicable when the wife is unable for one reason or another to work. The loss of material goods in such cases is highly possible. It might involve the foreclosure of a mortgage or the loss of a car, a television set, or other items. In such cases starting over is a most demoralizing procedure.

Some people might never bring themselves back up to the level or standard of living which they once knew and which they worked so hard to achieve. How does this affect a person mentally? In some cases there is an extension of the emotional aspect. A good citizen in the society which surrounds him might become seriously warped in the face of non-existent benefits, particularly after illness, which quite conceivably might be followed by a loss of employment. This is basically what we are discussing today, the inability of a person to carry on his or her work because of illness. These people who may have been hard working taxpaying citizen contributors to our society sometimes because of illness end up as bitter persons devoid of any ambition or any desire to take care of their commitments.

I would hope that these few suggestions that I make in respect of the bill brought forward by the hon. member for Nickel Belt might be useful to him, and I would invite him to bring them to the attention of the Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration. I would hope that this bill would not be left to die on the order paper or remain dormant. I should like to see it revitalized and discussed more fully.

Mr. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Madam Speaker, with his bill today the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) has reminded the House of the necessity for more work on the existing Unemployment Insurance Act in order to improve it in some parts and to bring about some profound changes in other parts. His proposal of course is to be commended. We certainly agree with him on the substance of what he has put forward to the House.

If the hon. member had assiduously attended the meetings of the Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, as he did in the past, he might agree with some of

[Mr. Parent.]

us that to proceed piecemeal on this very important piece of legislation would not really be in the best interests of the country and the people who benefit from the legislation. As was mentioned by the hon. member for Kamouraska (Mr. Dionne) we would rather include this suggestion, since others that have been put forward by members in various parts of the House, as part of a total package that could be considered by the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) in the hope that he will soon bring forward basic changes to the existing legislation.

I should like to give some examples of where there is need for improvement. There should be extensions in respect of the qualifying period as it affects people who are in receipt of Workmen's Compensation Board payments. In that same category we should also look at the situation of people who suffer from extended illnesses. Amendments are also necessary there. Then there are those people who have been imprisoned, who had been employed before imprisonment and perhaps while in prison. Consideration should be given to these people so that it would be easier for them to enter the work force. Then in respect of people engaged in labour disputes we should consider an extension of the qualifying period. There are also those who are involved in occupational and vocational training courses.

There are also other examples one might give in relation to the initiative taken by the hon. member. It seems to me there should be rewards under the law for people in relation to their attachment to the labour force. In other words, the longer one has worked the longer one should be entitled to benefits. This kind of reward presently is absent from the legislation. Surely Canadians who have been working for a period of 20 or 30 years understandably feel they are entitled to a reward in proportion to the number of years they have worked. They should be rewarded for the continuity of their work so that when they happen to become unemployed this would be reflected in the legislation.

We should eliminate the practice of benefit control officers penalizing innocent people who really do not understand what they are asked to sign in the form of statements submitted to them by the benefit control officers. We should improve the language of the forms which people find extremely difficult to understand when they have to fill them out. We should also provide notice to claimants that they are about to run out of benefits in two or three weeks' time. This should be the procedure rather than the present system whereby someone receives a letter saying that he or she has run out of benefits, period.

Then there should be substantial amendments in respect of training allowances for people undergoing training so that they will have a better income while being trained for jobs. There should also be a rule that would permit the fund to create jobs in the public sector when there is a shortage of jobs in the private sector. I see it is six o'clock, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Morin): The hour appointed for the consideration of private members' business having expired, I do now leave the chair until eight p.m.

At six o'clock the House took recess.