

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

various countries, trying to discover the causes of unemployment and the means used elsewhere to fight it.

Programs aimed at the distribution of direct relief were tried. Some valid men were even enrolled for 20 cents per day at Valcartier and elsewhere. There was no question of classifying the unemployed into categories; it was a total economic chaos. More than half the people were experiencing hardship and lack of money was responsible for all those periods of anguish. The gamblers in matters of money and credit had lost their bearings on the stock exchange in the course of that crisis of collective hysteria.

Having in mind this situation, I wish to say this respecting Bill C-229: I invent nothing when I say that the Unemployment Insurance Act which was enacted several years ago and amended now and then, is not sufficiently well understood by the workers, and I may add that this can be attributed to several reasons. One of the main reasons is that politicians elected with the support of financiers ask their legal counsels to draft a piece of legislation with enough restrictions to ensure the Fund's protection while allowing workers who become unemployed to receive benefits if they meet the requirements established under the plan; the first requirement is that they must have paid their contributions. The politicians in power are thus treated to some political campaigning at the taxpayers' expense by playing up an increase of weekly benefits up to \$100 though it is obvious that the number of those who will qualify will be quite small.

But this helps keep hope alive among the thousands of unemployed who find themselves in a demoralizing position.

I have often said in this House that legislation should be drafted in intelligible language so that misinterpretations or even confusion could be avoided.

To prove my point, I will quote a few clauses of the bill, which contains 157 of them. Clause 23 reads as follows:

Waiting period 23. A claimant is not entitled to be paid benefit for a week in an initial benefit period until following the commencement of that initial benefit period he has served a two week waiting period that begins with a week of unemployment for which benefits would otherwise be payable.

Can you imagine what an unemployed will take that to mean? In clause 24, under the title "Rate of benefit", one can read in subparagraph (i), and I quote:

...but the maximum weekly amount of benefit payable shall not exceed sixty-six and two-thirds per cent of the maximum weekly insurable earnings and the minimum weekly amount of benefit payable to a claimant described in subparagraph (ii) of paragraph (b) shall not be less than seventy-five per cent of one-third of the maximum weekly insurable earnings.

Let us imagine what a poor unemployed will make of that. It is well known that that allows public servants—and I will explain it presently—to prepare the kind of regulations which leave all kinds of openings. There are loopholes in the law which will let anything through.

An hon. Member: An elephant.

Mr. Dionne: Yes, an elephant.

[Mr. Dionne.]

Such drafting requires public servants, who are responsible for implementing the law, to formulate regulations which will have to be enforced and which will be used to establish the eligibility of unemployed to benefits.

That is why numerous misunderstanding problems occur regarding the recognition of the rights of some unemployed.

Let us remember the measure provides that there must be communication between officials of the Commission and those of the Department of Manpower and Immigration and, sometimes, those of the regional offices of the welfare department in order to help people without income find some means of subsistence. Let us try to imagine what could happen in some cases.

I hope all unemployed will be understood. Their problems are complicated enough without their having to suffer the bad temper of some officials who do not always realize they owe their jobs to jobless, and the demoralizing effects that ensue.

A better legislation might hold them under the law of gravity, allowing them to keep both feet on the ground, and would doubtless spare them swollen heads, which often lead some of them to think better of themselves than they should, with the result that some of the unemployed suffer real hardships.

I feel that it would be in order, as I have already mentioned, to make a few suggestions which could, to my mind, be included into the new law. They could replace harmful clauses or be added to the 157 clauses already incorporated into Bill C-229.

The necessary steps should be taken to indicate on the insurance cheques what period they cover. With computers, it should be possible to add that detail; it would help clear up many problems and let the unemployed know for what period insurance is being paid. It seems to me this should be simple enough to do, and it would do away with many inconveniences.

In the second place, we should find a way to cover operators of equipment such as trucks, tractors, caterpillars, skidders and others.

A rate could be set for the services of the equipment and another for the wages of the operator.

Those adjustment procedures for unemployment insurance are quite important, since in many cases, the owners of those machines are not included in the class of workers to which the legislation and regulations apply. They are often considered as truckers and craftsmen or sub-contractors.

● (9:40 p.m.)

One should reconsider the possibilities of entitlement to benefits of some employers who have gone bankrupt. According to their type of work, they may have been considered as employers, since their undertaking required the employment of a few workers, and because of particular conditions, their business becomes unprofitable, and after having paid unemployment insurance contributions, being occasional employers, they cannot get any help, when they are struggling with serious problems.