

Students cut off UIC

OTTAWA (CUP)—Despite rising student unemployment, the federal government has decided to effectively prevent students from claiming unemployment insurance.

Under changes to UIC announced September 1 by Employment and Immigration Minister Bud Cullen, students would have to work at least 40 weeks in the previous two years and 10 to 14 weeks in the previous year to be eligible for UIC. Currently, the requirement is 10 to 14 weeks in the previous year.



Ginny Green of the Coalition for Full Employment explains the unemployed workers UIC appeal to CBC radio's Sheila Jones

According to National Union of Students (NUS) spokesperson Pat Gibson, this will effectively cut students off UIC because very few can work more than 16 weeks during the summer.

Gibson termed the change "disastrous".

"This will cut many students off UIC for several years. It's conceivable that a student could work for three summers and still not be eligible for UIC," she said.

Other changes included cutting unemployment insurance from sixty-six and two thirds per cent of wages to sixty per cent, increasing the number of weeks needed to receive UIC if a claimant has received UIC in the last year and increasing the

minimum number of hours worked in a week needed to claim UIC.

Cullen also said the government planned to make workers and businesses pay part of the costs of UIC in the labour extended phase—the second entitlement phase after the first 25 weeks. Currently worker and business contributions only pay for the first phase, while the government pays all the costs of the labour extended phase.

In introducing the changes, Cullen said he hoped that they would discourage people from using UIC "as their major source of income interrupted only by periods of short term employment" and would "break the cycle of reliance on UI that some claimants have built up".

He also said they would "exclude those who have at best a tenuous and marginal attachment to the labour force".



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Unemployment increases

by Nigel Allen

Once again the summer unemployment rate for young Nova Scotians was higher than for youth in most other parts of the country. According to Statistics Canada, 22,000 Nova

Scotians or 17.7% of those between the age of 15 and 24 were out of work for the month of July.

Nationally, 14% of this age group were unemployed in July. Tony Kelly a spokesperson for

the Atlantic Federation of Students (AFS) said the real unemployment figures were much higher because Stats Canada uses an arbitrary definition to decide whether someone is unemployed.

The Canada Manpower Centres for Students in Nova Scotia placed less than half of the 22,900 people who registered there. They found 10,100 jobs for students this summer, according to Al Rubin, provincial coordinator of the Summer Youth Employment Program for Employment and Immigration Canada. Fewer students registered this summer than last, and Rubin suggested a lot of students found jobs on their own or didn't want to work.

Kelly said students don't register at the student centres "because they're discouraged and they know they probably won't get a job anyway. The statistics show it."

Two federal government job creation programs (Young Canada Works and the Federal Job Corps) created about 1000 fewer jobs than last year. Private sector jobs increased, so that the total number of placements remained the same.

Rubin said staff from the student centres "worked harder" and made more visits to employers this year to encourage them to hire students. An advertising campaign also encouraged employers to hire students.

Of the 10,100 placements in Nova Scotia, 3080 were short-term or casual; 7050 were for longer periods. The centres found jobs for 5200 of the 12,500 high school students who registered, and for 4900 of the 10,400 post-secondary students.

Paybacks contested

by Mark Simkins

The Unemployment Insurance Commission is in the midst of a battle with people in Nova Scotia who, because of an error on the part of a UIC computer programmer, are being asked to pay back up to \$700. each. Dalhousie Legal Aid and the Halifax Coalition for Full Employment are representing nineteen of the 5,058 people affected.

A UIC technician apparently fed the wrong statistics for four months of 1977 into the UIC computer and people unknowingly received over an average of four weeks benefits more than the Commission intended.

This summer UIC sent out letters of "Disintitlement" to the people it claimed were overpaid, and encouraged them to start paying back through deductions from current UIC accounts or by paying off the debt.

Dal Legal Aid and the Coalition however appealed the decision and convinced the commission they had a right to have a group hearing of nineteen people. They hope the material they have gathered will help other claimants making appeals and that they can set a precedent by winning a form of class action suit.

The main argument against the Commission is the UIC's own distortion of its act. They found the commission to be stretching its own terms to try and collect the money.

A brief presented to UIC maintains the term "Disintitlement" can only be used in cases of deliberate bad faith on the part of UIC claimants, such as fraud. "There is no way it can be used to collect money lost through the UIC's own negligence, and there is no

clear legislature to deal with computer error," the coalition brief states.

They also discovered that the UIC has written off its own mistakes in the past. The Commission once forgot to ask people who received UIC benefits if they also received Canada Pension Plan benefits, an error which allowed some older people to receive more than expected.

The Coalition feels equal compassion should be given to Maritimers who are in an area where there are 33 unemployed people for every job vacancy.

After last week's first hearing the claimants still felt they had a good case. The three person judicial board had listened to the entire brief and presented no real argument against it. The meeting was finished hours before the appellants had expected. But, as Ginni Green of the Coalition said, "The board may listen, but bureaucracies are known not to be consistent. They can be arbitrary as the original action indicates."

"Besides, the UIC commission has vowed to fight the appeal to the highest court in the land, so the battle is far from over."

Ironically, it will probably cost the UIC as much as the 1.5 million dollars it would lose by admitting its mistake, to collect the overpayment.



In less than a week, this clown could be premier.