

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

tions were posed. How can the unemployment insurance system be best used to promote training and prepare the unemployed to find jobs? Are arrangements under Section 39 of the Act sufficiently flexible to provide income for all who can profit from training? How can arrangements under the Canada Assistance Plan best support a co-ordinated country-wide skills development strategy? The document indicated that part of the answer would be an extension of training for those in receipt of unemployment insurance, including training in courses not directly sponsored by the Government. It would seem clear to anyone familiar with this document that the Bill before us today is a singly resourceful effort to prod the Government along the path it appears bound to take. It would be unfortunate and indeed hypocritical if Hon. Members in the House today did not express their support for the Bill by referring it for third reading.

**Mr. Alan Redway (York East):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to have an opportunity to make a few comments in connection with Bill C-221, an Act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971. I, too, would like to congratulate the Hon. Member for La Prairie (Mr. Jourdenais) for bringing the Bill forward. It is an excellent initiative by a private Member and one that certainly should be applauded.

The Unemployment Insurance Act is one of the cornerstones of our social security system. This is what gives me particular pleasure in having an opportunity to say a word or two about it. Years ago, as we are all aware, there was no such thing as unemployment insurance. Anyone who was faced with the tragedy of losing his or her job was forced on to the dole or general welfare assistance. Before then there was not even that type of assistance to look after someone who lost his or her job. I suspect that everyone in the Chamber today, and perhaps every Member of the House, has had that type of experience in their own family circle or in their circle of friends. We have had that type of experience in my own family. Before there was anything like unemployment insurance or general welfare assistance, my family had the tragic experience of unemployment. I can recall stories my parents and relatives told about members of the family having to struggle in that sort of a situation, and I can recall quite clearly the stories of members of my family who lived out the final years of their existences in complete and absolute poverty because of that sort of problem.

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Fortunately for all of us, this sort of thing does not exist any longer. The unemployment insurance concept is one which recognizes that anyone who loses his or her job does not do so through his or her own fault. It provides people a method of providing for themselves and their families through a system to which they themselves have been able to contribute. That allows them to carry on with a great deal of dignity and a feeling of self-worth. A lack of self-worth is probably one of the worst problems associated with losing one's job. It is obviously not nice to have one's income suddenly cut off, but above and beyond all that is the dreadful feeling that one is not quite as worthy as one's neighbour who has a job. Certainly

this type of legislation has made sure that that sort of problem will not exist.

In spite of the fact that the general principles of unemployment insurance are universally accepted, there are a good many problems with the details of the Unemployment Insurance Act. Over the last several years, there have been a number of such instances pointed out by a good many people. There has been a lot of debate and concern about a variety of different aspects of the Unemployment Insurance Act. Just to name two or three such aspects, there is obviously a concern about the waiting period that exists before benefits can be collected. There is some question over whether or not, if one leaves one's job voluntarily, there should be a lengthening of the waiting period rather than the waiting period which now exists. As well, concerns have been raised about the amount of time one should have to work before qualifying for benefits. That too has been a matter of a great deal of concern and debate over the last few years on the part of those who feel that the unemployment insurance system has been abused from time to time.

In addition to that, there is the concern of employers and particularly small business employers over the contributions they must make to the fund and the feeling that those are out of proportion to the earnings they can generate within their own businesses. Because of that, there have been recent suggestions for changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act. It has been suggested that we could take some of the employers' contribution provisions out of the Act and pay those contributions out of general tax revenues or the Consolidated Revenue Fund. All of those items are items at which we must look seriously.

The concern set out by the Hon. Member for La Prairie in Bill C-221 is another concern at which we must look very seriously with a view to amending the Act to make sure that there is equity and fairness in the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act. A number of Hon. Members have referred to the purpose of this Bill. It is the intention of this Bill that a person attending a course or program of instruction or training chosen and paid for by him or her should receive benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act subject to the approval of the Commission since such a person, unlike those attending courses paid for by the Commission itself, is not now entitled under the present provisions of the Act to receive unemployment insurance benefits because he or she is considered to be unavailable for work. That is certainly an admirable proposal and one which I suspect every Member of the House endorses. It would seem that people who propose to pay for their own training and education in order to improve their employment chances should not be in a worse position than those who rely on training courses set out by the Commission itself. I endorse that proposition wholeheartedly.

The wording of the Bill itself, as I understand it, however, causes at least one technical difficulty in the administration of the Act. That has to do with the appeal provisions. As I understand it, the revised Section 103 would provide that where there was an appeal and the appeal was granted in a