

Unemployment Insurance

● (1740)

I am often appalled when I look at some of the Opportunities for Youth programs. I had a case brought to my attention some weeks ago where students were employed in measuring the cubic feet capacity of all the stone or brick buildings in a certain city, I presume in case of an eventual emergency. The students were going all over the buildings measuring the height, width, depth, and so on. The manager of one building said to them, "If you go down to the office of the secretary-treasurer he will give you the blueprints of the building; they show the exact measurements". One of the students replied, "But, Sir, this project is supposed to last for 12 weeks. If we did that, it wouldn't last so long". That is one example, Mr. Speaker. There are some splendid Opportunities for Youth programs, but some have been utter nonsense. Too often in our society we tend to lose sight of all the good ones, and maybe I am guilty of that at the moment in recalling this preposterous one.

The hon. member for Verdun is a man for whom I have high regard. Indeed, he is such a champion of labour that I think he should be in the party which was founded by Sir John A. Macdonald who legalized trade unions in this country. But I do not quite think he grasped the problem with which the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles) was dealing, and that was the unjust infliction on students when they must contribute to unemployment insurance at a time and under conditions where they are ineligible to draw benefits from unemployment insurance.

Anyone who has students of university age in his family knows how great is the need for these young people to find meaningful work. And we know how hard they are having it in obtaining summer employment this year. In fact, I believe that this year, despite what Statistics Canada says, young people are finding it more difficult than ever before. There is not a day that I do not receive letters from young people who are trying desperately to get jobs. Then you have this injustice, this taking of contributions from people who can never collect any benefit.

Mr. Mackasey: May I ask the hon. gentleman a question? With respect to the student who cannot possibly find a job and who paid 12 weeks' contributions last summer, would you deny him unemployment insurance on the basis of his contributions last summer?

Mr. Macquarrie: I am thinking of the fortunate little lad or little girl who has got a job.

Mr. Mackasey: I did not ask about them. I am asking about the one who cannot find a job, the one you describe so eloquently.

Mr. Macquarrie: I hope, despite my eloquence, that that young girl is not going to be forced out of university next year. I want her to go to university next year also. We can argue back and forth about a particular student, but the issue is that the benefits, the payments will not be paid to these young people. Contributions are being lifted from people to whom, in the main, benefits will never be paid.

The temptation to deception is there and I am afraid, as with a great many of us, great Christians, there is a yielding to temptation. This is not very helpful. In fact,

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

one of the things that has troubled me most about unemployment insurance is that there always has been a built-in temptation to finagle around.

I think, and I have said it for ten years—in fact, for 20 years—that unemployment insurance has been a God's blessing to thousands and thousands of Canadians. There are many people in my province who can pay their bills in wintertime because of unemployment insurance. But when it loses the concept of an insurance scheme and becomes a welfare scheme, then we are in trouble. That is why I was so disturbed last March when the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde), who is my "shadow", speaking in Montreal talked about social welfare programs and he mentioned unemployment insurance. I never did get his text, but I do not think that was wise. We must stick by the concept of insurance.

Another thing that struck me, and either member has mentioned it, is that when we find in society that literally dollar for dollar it is more profitable for a man to be on unemployment insurance than to be working, then I say the attack should not be made on the man or on the unemployment insurance system but on the wage scale. Unfortunately, there are places in Canada where it is more profitable to draw the dole than it is to work, because the wage rate is too low. It should never be easier, in financial terms, for a man to draw unemployment insurance. As I have said more than once, I think the question of how unemployment insurance is handled is important. It deserves examination and sometimes criticism. But the essence is that the problem is unemployment rather than unemployment insurance.

Despite the denigration of the work ethic, I think that in a country such as ours, still a young country, possessed of vast riches untapped and unexplored, we should be able to find meaningful work for our people. Sometimes there are those who laugh and sneer at the work ethic. Mr. Speaker, we are being pushed out of the markets of the world by some countries where the work ethic is still important. Don't tell me the work ethic does not mean anything to the Japanese, does not mean anything to the West Germans, or does not mean anything to that tremendous nation of 800 millions people, the Chinese. These people still believe work is important and that work is valuable. It is up to us to make sure in our society that work is meaningful and available.

That is why I always thought it was a matter of profound good judgment when the leader of my party long ago zeroed in on unemployment as one of the real social curses afflicting the country. Certainly we must look at these things which the mover of the motion has mentioned so well and so thoughtfully. We must always examine the unemployment insurance inequities, and perhaps inequities, without abandoning that very useful part of our society. But surely we must not discard the work ethic. I think it is the job of government, of parliamentarians, to bring about a society in which the people do work and in which it does not benefit one to linger, to leisure, to languor and to idle.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Caouette (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I have listened with interest to what my colleagues have had to say and I am astonished that all three speakers seem to lay