

Unemployment Insurance Act

In my opinion, there is an easy way to get rid of the abuses and the cost of the unemployment insurance program, and that is for this government to quit playing games with our unemployed and to bring in employment measures which will provide full employment. This act was designed to operate at a maximum rate of 4 per cent unemployment. In its generosity, the government agreed to pick up the premiums beyond that; but only for two months, I think, since 1971 has this plan ever operated at what was considered to be the maximum level of unemployment anticipated. Rather than increasing the penalties for those unfortunate persons who are out of work, this government should be instituting employment programs.

● (1700)

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I will just take a few moments to say that we reject this motion. My friend indicates this time, as he did last time, that he does not understand the decision. I would refer him once again to the paper that was supplied to hon. members to assist them in determining whether to accept the minister's position with respect to another amendment. For the hon. member's edification, I refer to the paper that I quoted from yesterday which gave the information that the minister and his officials have accumulated since 1971. The last paragraph on page 2 reads:

Evidence accumulated since 1971 indicates that the three-week disqualification has not been achieving its objective of minimizing the extent to which claimants voluntarily terminate their employment without just cause, are discharged for misconduct, or refuse suitable employment.

An hon. Member: Oh, come on, that is not complete.

Mr. Peters: That is like hanging everybody because somebody got their purse snatched in the park.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I sat here listening to my hon. friend and never said a word while he went on for 20 minutes and said zilch. I have been up for a minute and a half. But I will not be distracted. I do not want to take the time of this House; I want to get the bill passed. I want to make a couple of points, however. We on this side of the House, and particularly members to the immediate left, are always looking for disincentives. The socialists dislike that word. Now we have found another disincentive, the three-week disqualification period.

If the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) had had the opportunity—notice how kind I am—of attending the hearings of the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration, he would have had the benefit of the advice of Mr. Chafe who is a member of the Canadian Labour Congress. In issue No. 23 of the proceedings for November 20, at page 23:10 Mr. Chafe said:

I do not think we would argue very strongly about whether it was one to six weeks or one to two weeks. The problem lies in the fact that, before that disqualification is attached to a claim and before it ensues, the claimant should be given a better opportunity to make his case to the insurance officer or to some agency in the commission.

At page 23:11 he said:

Mr. Alexander, we may have a question of a technical draft or something, but the suggestion I would put forward immediately is that the committee might recommend a change in that amendment that will build into it the feature that claimants, faced with disqualification under these sections, would first be given the opportunity to put their

[Mr. Peters.]

case before the commission, before the insurance officer actually applies the disqualification.

In other words, he was not too worried. He was worried about the appeal procedure, however, and this is where I would ask the minister to focus his attention. I should like to refer to issue No. 27 of the proceedings of the same committee. I respect the minister and I know that he has a lot of information that I do not have, so I ask questions in order to find out what he has. I was concerned about this sort of thing, about whether we were dealing with a disincentive or not. In the proceedings for December 2, at page 27:11 I asked the minister:

In other words, the section as it was, is a disincentive. You have accepted that, therefore you are attempting to tighten it up. Do you agree with all that, sir?

MR. ANDRAS (PORT ARTHUR): That is correct.

MR. ALEXANDER: Thank you.

THE CHAIRMAN: Mrs. Appolloni.

MR. ANDRAS (PORT ARTHUR): There is only one comment, Mr. Alexander. I would not want to accept the broad condemnation, or the implied condemnation of the UIC as the general disincentive. I said there were some disincentives in the act, this being one of them.

Mr. Speaker, I do not want to take up any more of the time of the House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: At least I am more responsible than some of the people to my left and all the nonsense they come up with. Let me end without getting caught up in that nonsense. We have said that the Canadian people are looking for the removal of disincentives. They found one in the three-week advance, and we removed that. We hope that will satisfy some of us who are extremely concerned about the direction the act is going. We found another disincentive, and we are removing it. As a result, I have no hesitation in saying that we do not intend to support the hon. member's motion.

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville): The hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) spoke about disincentives, Mr. Speaker. I wonder why it is always a disincentive when some poor person is getting hit. Why is it not a disincentive when wealthy people are getting hand-outs or subsidies? Rich people can write off a tax burden because of capital gains, and that is called an incentive; but if it is a poor person, it is no longer called an incentive.

I should like the hon. member for Hamilton West to visit my riding or my office. I will show him some of the disincentives on file where rural people have been disqualified because they cannot afford to drive 100 miles a day for the minimum wage or below. Is that not a disincentive? Would many wealthy people working for high salaries go to that expense? It is like Conservatives saying that free enterprise must get a contract—but free enterprise has to get a subsidy to keep going.

Mr. Epp: Like Skywest.

Mr. Nystrom: Like Skywest. I am glad the hon. member mentioned that. He wants that contract to go to a private airline. That is free enterprise on the backs of the taxpayers. No wonder those Neanderthals went in droves to