

Anti-Inflation Act

This total increase reflects in part the increase in unemployment. Unemployment in 1974 averaged 5.4 per cent and has been running this year at an annual rate of 7.2 per cent, an increase of 31 per cent; and there are indications it will rise to at least 8 per cent by the end of the year. However, unemployment statistics as such do not account for all the increase in pay-outs. While unemployment rose by 31 per cent, the total cost of UIC from April, 1974, to April, 1975, rose by 69 per cent. More important is the fact that the length of benefit period for recipients increased by 51 per cent over the same period.

Since I have been a Member of Parliament it has been my understanding that the unemployment insurance plan is a stopgap scheme to assist the person who becomes unemployed. It is to assist him to get over the period until he is again employed. The way the scheme works now, with the amount of benefits being provided, it has become almost a way of life to many Canadians. A great many Canadians misuse the unemployment insurance fund, and this misuse must be stopped. Further, a great many people pay into the fund who never receive any benefit from it. In effect, they subsidize those who rightfully and wrongfully secure benefits. The people to whom I refer receive no benefit whatsoever during a lifetime of work, although they contribute a tremendous amount of money to the fund. As Members of Parliament, we must see that the unemployment insurance fund gets back on the right track again. We must see that it gets back on the road to reality, because some of the things that happen now are unreal.

If one is looking for ways to save money, there are a number of ways this can be done. One way would be to combine the Unemployment Insurance Commission with the Manpower operation in this country. We made a major mistake in separating them. The sooner government accepts that this is the time to bring the two together, the sooner the problems associated with the fund will be eliminated. I see that the minister nods his head and I assume he agrees the two operations should be combined.

I believe we could save money by packaging the two operations together. In this way the service could be improved and the public would be given the assurance that the man in the unemployment insurance office was aware of the jobs that were available. Also, in this way, I believe, a service could be provided to business people and others who require employees, because they would be able to go to the same office and determine from the manager which people were unemployed and available for work in the required categories. This would do much to streamline the operation and to save money.

We must also have a more basic realistic benefit qualification period. Too short a time is involved when in a period of eight weeks one can qualify for unemployment insurance for a period of 40 weeks. This is just not realistic. There may be many things we should do in order to get the fund in more realistic balance, but one thing we must do is extend the period of qualification from eight weeks to at least 12 weeks as we suggested when the legislation was first before the House. If it should be found that a period of 12 weeks would not bring the fund into a realistic balance, then we would have to consider a period of 16

weeks, which is the period which existed under the old legislation.

So far as the amounts available are concerned, I say we should go step by step in an effort to extend the period of time for qualification and see what the result is before we attempt anything further. I believe we should also determine whether the amounts to be paid are too high in comparison with what is available on the street if a person is employed. There is not much fun working if one can receive as much money while not working.

The problem that exists in many parts of Canada is that business operations have a competitor in the form of the unemployment insurance plan. This situation exists in my area. At the same time, unemployment insurance is a godsend to most people in my part of Canada. It is crucial to the livelihood of many people in the Atlantic provinces, because most of the people who look for jobs, especially at this time of the year, are unable to find them no matter how hard they look. At the same time, however, there are employers who have difficulty finding people to work for them. While people are in receipt of unemployment insurance there are many jobs for which they are not available. I am sure each of us is aware of cases where employers are looking for people to do a job and cannot find them.

● (1710)

There has to be realism, but there is no realism when you have the Prime Minister telling people they do not have to work if they do not want to. That is the kind of philosophy we must overcome, the kind of philosophy that has done a great deal to produce some of the problems we are facing.

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Coates: I do not know what the hon. gentleman across the way is saying.

Mr. Muir: It doesn't matter what he said, because he never says anything worth while.

Mr. Coates: I would suggest to you, my friend, that I will come into the House without a text any time at all, as I am doing right now. Try to emulate me, that is all. Sit around here a while, learn a little, and perhaps you will get to be a bright boy. But now you are a long way from that. Talk to the fellow beside you who has brains and knows what he is doing.

I want to make a suggestion to the Minister of Agriculture. I was very concerned about the near accident in which he and his family were involved, as I am sure all hon. members were. But I suggest to him seriously—not because he almost happened to be in an accident—that one of the examples he could set for the taxpayers of this nation is to convince the government to put the fleet of executive jets at their disposal in cold storage, and say to the cabinet ministers and everyone else that this nation has airlines which most people have to use, and there is no reason why government members should not use them except in circumstances of great urgency where the use of a government jet is required.

In most instances there is no real reason to use the fleet of government aircraft used by cabinet ministers today. I think the Canadian people would be really impressed if