

Unemployment Insurance

either voluntarily or involuntarily—the Hon. Member is aware of people in his riding who were unable to go to the unemployment insurance office. Suppose a person stopped working on December 31. The unemployment insurance office is closed on January 1. Because the person in question received separation payments, that person would not go to the unemployment insurance office until after January 10, and unfortunately, if the Government maintains its decision, there will be at least 2,500 people in Canada who will not be reimbursed. Will the Hon. Member, considering that he defends the rights of his constituents, support the amendments proposed by the Liberal Party?

[English]

Mr. Howie: Madam Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for his question which was like a multiple choice question. It contained quite a few questions.

People who retired before January 5, 1986 are covered by the Bill and are henceforth entitled to benefit. Of course, everyone is always entitled to apply for benefit. The question is whether the pension income applied to the benefit would reduce it to zero or substantially reduce it.

I assume the Hon. Member means with his question that people who retired technically and filled in the forms after January 5, 1986 should not be subjected to the regulation.

The Bill deals with people who retired before January 5, 1986, and, substantially, pension will not be considered in computing their benefits in the future. The Bill also deals with people who retire after January 5, 1986 and subsequently obtain a job. In the future, after they obtain a job they too are, to put it colloquially, home free.

What about people who retire after January 5, 1986 and before they get a job? That is the area which is not covered in the Bill, and that is the area which I drew to the attention of the House in my speech.

I hope that answers the Hon. Member's question. He asked me whether I would support a Liberal amendment. I would have to see the amendment and make a decision, when I see it, as to whether it is in order. I know one was introduced earlier, but I have not had the opportunity to obtain the "blues" and read them yet. However, I will look at them, and when the time comes for the vote I guess the Hon. Member will know.

I want to thank him very much for his interest in older workers and in all Canadians. I thank him for the hard work he did on the Standing Committee on Labour, Employment and Immigration that brought in some excellent recommendations at which we should be looking in the future.

Mr. Henderson: Madam Speaker, I have a short question for the Hon. Member for York—Sunbury (Mr. Howie). I know he has many veterans and service people in his riding. I must say that I have always known him to be a conscientious and fair-minded worker.

However, I want to ask him about the post-January 5, 1986 amendment which the Bill really covers. Armed Forces people, those employed in the RCMP, and others have had premiums for UIC deducted from their pay cheques. Under the Bill they will no longer be able to collect UI benefits after having paid in for some 25 years to 30 years, unless they can go out and find another job and work from 10 weeks to 14 weeks depending upon the variable entrance requirements in the location in which they happen to retire.

Could the Hon. Member comment upon the fairness of that one aspect? It seems that when one pays into unemployment insurance or any insurance, it should be there when one needs it. I realize that there is a very slight distinction when someone retires. However, in most cases in the Armed Forces they are not retiring voluntarily; they are being forced out. I feel that they should be eligible for UIC benefits the same as any other employee in any other occupation.

It seems to me—and I want a brief comment from the Hon. Member—that it is very unfair for the Government to ask these people to pay premiums all their lives and, just because they cannot find alternative employment after retirement, to tell them that they are no longer eligible to draw UIC benefits. I think it is wrong, and I should like to have some comments from the Hon. Member. I know he will give me fair comments on it.

Mr. Howie: Madam Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for his statement and for his question. They have been made with the clarity, experience, pungency, and sincerity we have come to expect of him.

I do not think there is any basic difference between the Hon. Member and myself in respect of this particular problem. The problem is that a person who retires early is not denied unemployment insurance.

Under the regulation, the pension income is considered as income and it is evaluated in the formula. It operates to reduce the amount of unemployment insurance a person receives. It is a relative type of thing.

However, in too many instances the weight of the pension can entirely wipe out the unemployment insurance, which substantially brings us to the same point the Hon. Member mentioned.

I see a difference between a person who retires early and exits from the workforce and a person who is forced to retire early, like many members of the Armed Forces and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. I feel that the people in the latter category who are forced out early and who are actively seeking work—that is the other qualification—should be eligible to receive unemployment insurance benefits.

• (1530)

That is the point I made in my speech, and one which I asked the Department and the Government to take a look at regarding future change. One could make this change by