

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

on, even if it is necessary, in the kind of language and with the kind of spirit in which it seems to be carrying it on.

Mr. Jim McNulty (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, with all due deference to the hon. member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow), there is nothing in the advertisements which even hints at discouraging people from drawing benefits. Out of a series of four advertisements, the aim of three of them is to explain features of the program and to inform the public as to how and when they should contact the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

To let people know about the pitfalls of fraudulently obtaining benefits it is necessary to dwell on matters which are, to say the least, unpleasant. However, if one considers the consequences which follow when people are found to have obtained benefits illegally, the reason for the warning becomes more apparent. Every year thousands of people are found to have made false declarations to obtain unemployment benefits and the consequences to many of these people are rather sad and severe. They are liable to repay the amounts that were obtained illegally and they are subject to fines and imprisonment.

• (10:20 p.m.)

These added hardships have to be borne at a time when people have already suffered difficult economic conditions. Few people realize the possibility of these consequences. We believe, therefore, that it is important that periodically—and once a year does not appear too often—a warning should go out as to the problem which can be created by fraudulently obtaining unemployment insurance benefits.

We have no knowledge that anyone has been discouraged by the advertisement from applying for benefits to which they are entitled. The volume of claims and the duration of claims would appear to be normal for this time of the year at all the offices of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. We are convinced, however, that the educational value of the total advertising series was one which was worth doing and one which will prevent people from making the mistake that practices which should not be accepted under any circumstances will be tolerated with regard to the payment of unemployment insurance benefits. It is clear that the advertising campaign was mainly educational, and as such it should help to restore faith in the system for the 98 per cent of the benefits which are drawn honourably and as a matter of right.

I wish to emphasize that the advertisement was in the public interest because it served to inform people of a service to which they are entitled. It helped to protect the unemployment insurance fund in which all employers, employees and the government have an interest as contributors; and it served as timely advice to people who through lack of awareness of the consequences of fraudulently obtaining benefits could perhaps be guilty of doing this. In the final analysis, the campaign should help restore in the mind of the people the value of the program to the hundreds of thousands of people who draw about \$400 million in benefits per year. The extent of fraud is not the main concern: better information about the operation of the program and the consequences of fraudulent practices is, in our view, a sound reason for the advertisement campaign.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.24 p.m.