

Government Orders

Across Canada we have 1.5 million people unemployed, according to the unemployment insurance statistics. We have an unemployment rate of 10.8 per cent. In Ontario the unemployment rate is 10 per cent or 532,000 people. In my own constituency, on the Lambton county side, there are 921 persons on unemployment insurance. However there are 2,428 people listed as being employable whose benefits have run out, for a total number of people who are unemployed of 3,349. On the Middlesex side of the constituency the total is 910 people.

We have five million Canadians now looking for work, 1.5 million listed in unemployment insurance figures. In addition we have 3.5 million employable people looking for work whose unemployment insurance benefits have run out.

In one town of 10,000 people in my constituency, three major lay-offs, due to the free trade agreement, have resulted in the loss of 465 jobs. The government's response was to reduce the staff at the unemployment insurance office in that town from two persons to one person and the office is open five hours a day. That is clearly unacceptable.

As I meet with the people, with those workers who lost their jobs through these plant closings due to the free trade agreement, I am becoming very angry with the way these workers are being treated. These people have paid into unemployment insurance for years. In fact, one man who was in my office last week had been at one of these plants for 27 years and contributing to unemployment insurance and now must be available for work if the opportunity opens up.

He has never once been unemployed in those 27 years, never once collected unemployment insurance, and now he is taking counselling and would like to be retained but it appears as if he has fallen through the cracks in the system. He is becoming very frustrated and upset, to say the very least. Like others in this town who have lost their jobs through plant closings as a result of the free trade agreement and whose insurance benefits have run out they have had to resort to social assistance. That is

placing an increasing burden on the municipalities, the counties and the province. These people deserve better.

• (1610)

I suggest this latest move by the government is to try to bring the Canadian system into line with that of the U.S., as in other cases to harmonize our system with theirs.

The officials from the Canada Employment and Immigration Centres have been instructed to give the claimants the benefit of the doubt in establishing just cause when they walk away from their jobs whether it is through sexual harassment or other reasons. Perhaps for health reasons they have to walk away or perhaps it is because of allergies they may have to chemicals or other products they are working with.

It goes on to say that the Canada Employment and Immigration Centres will receive special training including legislative knowledge training, adjudication principles and practices, technical and automation input training, and awareness training dealing with sexual harassment, discrimination, child care problems and unsafe working conditions.

This is of little consequence when only one person is staffing the office and it is open only five hours a day.

The unemployment insurance program is the federal government's single largest expenditure at \$22.5 billion forecast for 1993. Much of this, as I indicated earlier, is through the job losses and plant closings in this country since 1989.

More money is spent in the unemployment insurance program than on national defence, old age security, or the total administration of the federal government.

Before 1990 the federal government's contribution to the unemployment insurance fund was approximately 20 per cent. But in 1990 the government decided that general revenues could no longer contribute to the unemployment insurance fund.

We warned at that time what was going to happen. Since that time the fund which had been financed by unemployment insurance premiums, which are paid for by the employees and employers, has run up a deficit of