

Review of Unemployment Insurance Act

scissors as a fur cutter should not be prepared to work as a tailor or as a mender in a dry cleaning shop or something of that kind.

Again, consider the position of those who work on the Great Lakes. We know perfectly well that for many months of the year the lakes are frozen. Who is to say that a man who is skilled enough to be a lake pilot or a stevedore should not be willing to pull his weight in some other category by doing other work which encourages him to use his brains and ability?

• (5:50 p.m.)

The Canadian people are versatile and I think if we present the problem to them fairly, if we gather together the unions and management, representatives of the farmers and fishermen, of the owners of the boats and even of private industry, we can solve this problem. In many instances we have to get right down to individual cases. I do not know why the Unemployment Insurance Act Administration should not have the machinery to handle this. Goodness knows, we have enough tribunals and enough civil servants working in the unemployment insurance office that they could handle a lot of work in the way of counselling.

If the bottleneck is the unions let us bring them to the table and ask what they are going to contribute, what is their solution. I do not think we have all the answers here in the House of Commons, and in areas where we do not have the answers let us bring all these others into the picture and put the burden on them. I do not want to strait-jacket the unions in any way but I do want them to tell us what they are going to do to make sure people are fully employed, because when people are fully employed the Unemployment Insurance Act will look after itself.

With a judicious use of the carrot and the stick we can help those people who are lazy to go back to work and encourage the majority, who want to pull their weight in the boat, to get employment. I do not think those in the majority should be penalized and placed in a category which offers no benefit when their pay is stopped. Therefore I have no hesitation in backing the suggestion of the hon. member for Portage-Neepawa (Mr. Enns) that something be done immediately to improve the Unemployment Insurance Act.

Mr. Grant Deachman (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we are indebted to the hon. member for Portage-Neepawa (Mr. Enns) for introducing a resolution which

[Mr. Bigg.]

provides us with an opportunity to debate the Unemployment Insurance Act at a time when that act and proposals to amend it are coming under criticism and at a time when there is a considerable amount of public interest in the subject.

On July 17 the Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) gave an address to a conference sponsored by the Unemployment Insurance Commission at Queen's University, Kingston. I wish to quote a sentence or two from that address because it highlights some of the criticism which has been levelled at suggestions and proposals for amendment of the act. At one point the minister said:

The goal of universal coverage is one which has been long sought after and it has already caused a number of difficulties—notably in the case of extension of coverage to fishermen and more recently to horticultural and agricultural workers. Nevertheless, the goal remains a legitimate one.

Further on he said:

Whatever the motive, unemployment insurance as part of our social security system seems to be destined to extend its coverage into many untouched areas of employment.

Those remarks precipitated a deluge of briefs and representations to the minister and to members of parliament from people all across the country. Some of those representations have already been alluded to in the course of this debate.

On September 26 in an address to the Central Lions Club of Ottawa the minister alluded to his previous address and made some additional comments. I want to put these on the record. He said:

—I used certain words which, I now realize, guaranteed a strong response. One set of these words was "social security"; the other "universality".

He added:

The essence of what I did say at that time was: (a) The government no longer believes the unemployment insurance rates of 1959 are realistic today. It believes that \$36 for a married claimant with dependents and \$17 for a single claimant should be increased.

I certainly cannot quarrel with that and I would be prepared to support it, as I think would all other hon. members. The minister continued:

(b) The government also believes that to hold the income qualification level to \$5,460 per year is no longer realistic and should be reviewed appropriately.

Certainly I cannot disagree with that. Everyone knows of many classes of labour where wages have gone through the ceiling