

Unemployment Insurance Act

claims. If it were not for the tremendous cost and bureaucracy that would be generated, I think a good argument could be made for the idea that when a person enters the work force, a claim should be established so it is available in case of a need arising.

The greatest problem in this area seems to be in regard to the person who is not a member of a union and is laid off on a recall basis. That person expects to be recalled in the near future and perhaps does not actively seek other employment. It may well be that he would be throwing away his entire career if he accepted other work. It seems to me that that individual should be told what are his obligations and rights.

In my area, we have both the UAW and the UEW looking after the concerns of employees. I should like to compliment the union people associated with those unions for the job they have done in helping to establish initial claims when there have been major layoffs in the area. Along with people from the Unemployment Insurance Commission, they go right out to the plants and work on this matter. They work with the employees in an attempt to solve their problems and, failing that, they direct employees to their member of parliament who can have one more try at remedying the situation.

I am most anxious to see these programs carried out in close co-operation with manpower offices. People are always asking me how we can have so many employment opportunities available and a large number of people drawing benefits at the same time. The answer very simply seems to be that skills are not matched with the available jobs. The people who are unemployed do not have the skills which the marketplace is looking for or, if they do have them, they do not know about the opportunities.

I would hope we can take a long look at some of the things we could be doing under our manpower programs. For instance, if it were determined and accepted that there is no work available for a given period of time, particularly in areas where there is only one major employer who has had a layoff, it may well be to the benefit of the individuals that, rather than being confronted with a series of rejections in terms of employment, they have the opportunity of spending their time in manpower training to upgrade their skills. That way, when employment is again available, they are better qualified for the job they had, or, for an even better one.

Let me conclude on this note, as I know I have talked longer than I should. One of the most difficult things to deal with as a member of parliament is the individual who comes to the constituency office with an emotional problem brought on by some personal situation, resulting from stress on the job or because of a recent layoff resulting from a change in technology. This may involve an individual who is no longer able to cope with the situation, or who has suffered an accident or a major disability. These people go on unemployment insurance and, when the benefits begin to run out, they come to us. The real question is determining how you can get these people back into the work force. They can no longer cope with the noise or the speed of the situation, and there is a real reluctance on the part of an employer to hire this type of person. That is why I feel these pilot projects, in terms of

community programs in the country, are of real value. These programs can deal with some of these real employment problems. It is a downhill slide for such people unless someone takes a real interest in their cases.

I have been strongly aware of Unemployment Insurance Commission problems, having been involved particularly in handling the problems of a number of individuals. Rather than take up the traditional argument that we should lengthen the qualification period, decrease the benefits, do away with maternity leave and things of that sort, we should all work and offer constructive suggestions to help the Unemployment Insurance Commission do the best possible job of administering the act. If that does not satisfy the need, we should amend the act so that people who are trying very hard at this stage can do the job.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Madam Speaker, I believe a number of members are anxious to speak during this hour so I shall be very brief. Although I do not agree with all the points made today by the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand (Mr. Knowles),—we Knowleses often agree but there are times when we do not—I welcome the fact that he has put this motion before the House calling for a revision of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

The types of complaints made against the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act are mainly two. First, there are those who complain because there is abuse, and because there are people getting benefits to which they are not entitled. Such practices are not to be condoned, but frankly I do not worry very much about that whole aspect. There are plenty of others concerned in that way and, as the hon. member for Peel-Dufferin-Simcoe (Mr. Milne) has just said, the administration has tightened up in that respect.

● (1740)

The other type of complaint about unemployment insurance—and this is the sort of thing which comes to my attention all the time—is that too many people do not seem to be able to get the benefits to which they believe they are entitled, and far too many people are called on to repay benefits they have already received. I hope this aspect of the matter can be dealt with very soon.

I think I have to take half a minute to defend my friends in the Conservative Party against a statement made by the hon. member for Peel-Dufferin-Simcoe. It was not the Tories who blocked a certain unemployment insurance amending bill in the last parliament. It was the New Democratic Party, because the bill was directed to the first of the points to which I have referred, namely, abuses and so on. If that bill had contained some improvements in respect of benefits, as suggested so well by the hon. member for Peel-Dufferin-Simcoe, I am certain it would have been passed.

I shall keep my promise to be brief. I am glad we are having this discussion and I hope that sometime soon there will be some work done on improving the Unemployment Insurance Act and eliminating its weaknesses in respect of the needs of those who rely on it. The only other sentiment I want to stress is that I welcome the concern of my hon. friend from Norfolk-Haldimand that there be an

[Mr. Milne.]