

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

MANPOWER—REFUSAL OF UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS TO PERSONS TAKING COURSES

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, on February 9 I addressed the following question to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras);

Is it the policy of the government to refuse unemployment insurance to people who are taking manpower courses, giving as a reason that because they are taking the courses they are not available for work?

The answer the minister gave was:

Generally speaking, that is correct.

Then I asked when the new policy had been adopted. My question arose out of letters I had been receiving from my constituency. I should like to read one of these letters because it is most specific:

I recently took leave of absence from my job to complete my education in hopes of finding a better job. I am going to B.C. Vocational Institute.

I have worked at Weldwood of Canada for nine years prior to taking leave of absence. When I applied for adult education I was told I would receive \$73 a week from Manpower and around \$35 a week from unemployment insurance. I am receiving money from Manpower but the unemployment insurance has cut me off.

They have sent me cards to fill out and cards saying they owe me money. Then they said I was not able to qualify because I was unavailable for work. Manpower said I would be subsidized by the UIC or I would never have taken a leave of absence. I was making \$160 a week at the mill and am finding it a bit difficult managing on \$73 with a wife and two children to look after.

I would not have taken the course if I was not told by three different people that I would be receiving \$73 from Manpower and \$35 from unemployment. Could you please help?

• (2200)

It seems to me, from what I have been able to learn, that when this man applied for a manpower course and took leave of absence he was told by manpower officials he would be able to receive not only manpower training allowances but unemployment insurance as well.

Then evidently the regulations were changed, and from what I learned from telephoning Vancouver and speaking to the manpower officials there, the regulations must have been changed sometime during the last week of November, I think probably on November 24. That was the time the new regulations came in, and apparently the manpower people were told that from then on they would have no say in what happened to people taking courses except in so far as the courses themselves were concerned, that only the Unemployment Insurance Commission would be able to tell applicants what they would receive by way of unemployment insurance.

The point I want to make this evening, Mr. Speaker, is this. As far as I have been able to make out, this man and others like him applied before the new regulations went in to effect, at which time they were quite legitimately told that manpower would give them the training allowances, and unemployment insurance would give them benefits

Adjournment Debate

while they were taking the manpower course. As a result, this man in question in perfectly good faith went ahead and took the course, only to find himself cut off from unemployment insurance because he was declared to be unavailable for work.

Of course he was unavailable for work; he was taking a course and had leave of absence to do so. As I say, it seems to me very peculiar that a person is told to go ahead on the basis of one set of regulations, only to pull the rug out from under him when another set of regulations is passed. There are some cases of this sort where great hardship is suffered, quite apart from the injustice that I think is being done to these people.

I have known cases where the only way that a man taking a course, who had a family, was able to live was to get help from his parents or to move in with a relative. This kept his family going until he finished the course. This particular man was very lucky in one respect; he did have leave of absence and can go back to his job—if he and his family are able to survive until he finishes his manpower training course.

If I have my facts straight—and if I have not I should like to be set straight on the facts—I consider it to be very unjust to tell an applicant he will receive a training allowance while on the course, only to cut him off from unemployment insurance on the ground that he is unavailable for work while he is taking the course. I would be very glad to receive an explanation from the department. If the explanation is not one that is commensurate with justice and fair play, I would be very glad to know whether the department will make some restitution to this particular individual and others like him who, through no fault of their own, are caught by a change in regulations.

Mr. Mark MacGuigan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, claimants who are attending courses approved by manpower and to which they are referred by the Unemployment Insurance Commission are not required to prove availability while they are attending the course and are allowed to receive benefit. Such benefits represent the amount necessary to “top up” a claimant’s income from the training course after deducting the costs, if any, of living away from home. The benefits paid bring the claimant’s payments up to the benefit level he would have received had he not been on training. It is the general policy of the commission to refer claimants to courses of instruction under the Adult Occupational Training Act providing they have not voluntarily left full-time, regular employment in order to take the course of instruction.

I regret that I do not have with me information as to the time at which these regulations came into effect, but it is not my understanding that there has been any recent change in the regulations. I suspect the explanation is, rather, that the officer to whom the question was originally referred misunderstood the claimant’s situation, because if he were not leaving a job voluntarily and if he were being assigned by the Unemployment Insurance Commission to this course, then of course he would receive unemployment insurance benefits.

I suspect the difficulty arose because of the fact that he was moving from his employment and it is not the policy