

With the introduction of this new legislation, affecting as it does the lives of millions of Canadians, a new philosophy has become evident in the policies governing unemployment insurance. It is a philosophy of meeting the realities of life in Canada with far reaching and flexible programs designed to meet the individual needs of the men and women who make up the work force. One of the more forward-looking features of this new plan for unemployment insurance in Canada is the introduction of the claimant assistance program. Its aims are simple, easily expressed and understood, yet of such far reaching importance that its role cannot be underestimated.

Others in this debate have brought our attention to the fact that a temporary interruption of earnings can occur in almost any work situation. In short, seniority, good work performance and the nature of your profession are no longer adequate insurance against this contingency. In addition, you have been made aware of the meaningful steps taken to increase the benefits to expand the ease of access to the plan and the provisions for extended benefits in the face of adverse economic conditions. All these things represent tremendous improvements in the legislation.

I should like to say a few words, however, on a feature of the plan that represents not simply more of the same but, rather, a fundamental addition to the services available to individual Canadians through the unemployment insurance device. I am referring, of course, to the claimant assistance program or interview system. Through this procedure every claimant, who has been unemployed for more than eight weeks will be asked to participate in at least two interviews designed to motivate and inform him in respect of his personal search for employment.

In essence, the primary objective of the claimant assistance program is to provide information and assistance to claimants in order to help them find employment. With almost 97 per cent of all Canadian workers being included in this new unemployment insurance plan, it is well suited to assist claimants since an unemployed individual's first contact with government at any level is invariably through the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

The claimant assistance program can aid a claimant to develop and carry through an effective job search plan. It can also direct him to the wide range of Canada Manpower programs which are now available and, in many instances, toward other social development programs which are designed to meet specific individual needs. In order to meet this considerable responsibility, the new claimant assistance program will provide a much needed liaison between the Unemployment Insurance Commission and other government departments, agencies and programs. This will provide better and more efficient working relationships and co-ordination of effort to provide the claimant with the assistance he needs in the form of job search techniques, labour market requirements, retraining programs and social development services which may apply to his situation.

Research projects which have been conducted in several communities have indicated the worth of a service dedicated to examining the root causes of a man's unem-

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ployment problem and providing concrete, helpful answers. For instance, in one case a mechanic found himself out of work: in an interview with a claimant assistance guidance officer, he disclosed the fact that while he had been offered employment, he was unable to accept it because his tool-kit had been stolen. The guidance officer was able to put him in touch immediately with an agency which could assist him by providing the required tools. That man went back to work happy.

In another instance a claimant, driven to distraction by financial worries, pointed out that even if he got a job he was faced with other problems. His family was due to be evicted that day. A telephone call from the guidance officer to a most understanding and co-operative landlord soon removed that worry. The man went back to work. While these are isolated, personal problems afflicting just two people, the record is full of instances where material assistance offered by trained and competent people has materially assisted a man's or woman's return to employment far more quickly than in the past.

The claimant is invited to a personal interview, to review his case, with a guidance officer of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. During that interview every effort is made to develop the claimant's interest in solving his employment problem. The claimant's skills and experience are explored and steps are taken to sort out reasons which may have contributed to his unemployment. If the claimant is in fact available for work—and as hon. members know, some of them are not—a job search plan is developed to meet his specific needs. In addition, referrals are made to job training and placement agencies such as Canada Manpower centres and other social development agencies where requirements for this type of assistance are identified.

If the unemployment continues, the claimant is requested to return for a second interview. At this time the claimant and the guidance officer jointly review both the information and guidance provided to the claimant during the first interview, how well he had used the information given him and whether he had taken advantage of the different services to which he was referred. A search is carried out to discover causes for his unemployment, which may not be readily apparent, and to develop a new job search plan tailored to the claimant's needs. It is hoped this new service will materially reduce the length of time a claimant is jobless by promoting a far quicker return to full-time work. From research studies, there are strong indications that this can be accomplished by a more personal and direct approach than has been used in the past.

May I emphasize and underscore the fact that this is not some sort of a critical, carping police action designed to keep people in line. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) has made it quite plain that what occurs between the guidance officer and the claimant is privileged and every claimant interviewed will be assured of this fact. If in the course of an interview an irregularity is discovered in his claim, his attention will be drawn to that point and he will be advised that it is his responsibility to make the facts known. The officer conducting the interview cannot assume the individual's responsibility