

Unemployment Insurance Act

when 25 or 30 people started doing it at once and disrupted the business day, the message got through.

Why should people be forced into that sort of situation in order to make a point that should have been obvious with many of the kinds of arguments that were presented, both through the elected members and through officials of the commission on the spot, many times? But that sort of thing continues in many areas and there really does not seem to be much point to it. It wastes a lot of time, energy and money on behalf of people who simply do not have the money to spend, because they have been thrown out of work through no fault of their own.

● (1750)

I should like to refer to another situation which exists from time to time but hopefully is not too widespread. It may result from some over-enthusiasm when there is a drive on the part of government to cut back on expenditures and to attempt, as is sometimes suspected, to remove many people from the rolls. I am referring to a situation which occurred in the city of New Westminster in the fall of 1977 that was particularly gross. I should like to draw it to the attention of the minister because this kind of thing happens. It seems that the forms get more complex every year. There is a profusion of paper and various trick questions are floating all over the place.

Of course one of the standard questions has always been: "What rate of pay do you expect when you go out and apply for work? What rate of pay will you accept?" If a prospective job applicant wants to be safe and not be put into the danger of being cut off from benefits or never being allowed to collect them in the first place, he must answer this very standard question by saying, "the prevailing rate". If he sets any rate in his answer, very often the axe comes down and he does not get the benefits. One should say, "the prevailing rate", no matter how many times one is asked the question. One should come back with the same answer whether it is asked 100 or 200 times. Sometimes it is almost that ridiculous.

In the case in question, a young jobless woodworker went into the UIC office in New Westminster. He was asked this question innumerable times by the official. I suppose the questioner finally got tired and asked him, "What was the rate of pay at the last job in which you worked?" The young man told him, and he watched as the official of the commission wrote that answer into the blank following the question he had been trying to get answered for some time. None of us, least of all myself, will suggest that there are ogres working in this department who have a blood lust to cut people off UIC. But there is some kind of pressure on people when public servants, who are normally very conscientious, feel somehow driven into that kind of situation.

If this young woodworker had been an employee who was not aware of how the system worked, very likely he would never have received the benefits. He happened to realize something about his own rights. He went to the business agent of his local union and there was a little hell to pay, quite understandably. I hope that sort of thing does not happen

often, but we wonder just how many cases there are which perhaps are not that bad. I am thinking of cases which happen from time to time that we do not hear about. There are many, many people not at all aware of their rights for every one who realizes he or she can stand up and demand some recognition and justice.

From my own experience in being in lunchrooms over a number of years, in the federal sphere I do not think there is an institution which is perhaps more despised and hated in the country, with the possible exception of the compensation boards in the provinces. Both those institutions are presumably set up to assist people who are in need and thrown out of the workplace through no fault of their own. It is a shame those attitudes prevail, but something symbolic must be done from time to time. There should be some very clear statements and directives which people on the outside hear, if working people are to begin to renew their faith in government processes and in departments that are hopefully set up to help them in those circumstances. Certainly we would be far better served to do that than to have the profusion of advertisements to which the hon. member for Beaches (Mr. Young) referred a few moments ago. I am referring to the advertisements which only lead to increasing the backlash which seems all too ready to surface in times of high unemployment.

While I am on that topic, I should like to refer to another matter which is of great concern. It always surprises me that conservatives of Liberal or Tory stripe—I realize that not all people in both parties are conservatives and that there are some reasonably progressive people among both—can go out of their way from time to time to create backlashes. Particularly it is appropriate to some of my friends to my right who over the last three, four, five or six years have gone out and created a backlash. Then when governments of whatever stripe respond to that backlash, they make a career out of complaining about the results. That sticks in my craw, and it sticks in the craw of a lot of people with whom I have worked. It does not increase respect for the political and democratic process, nor of the people within it. We could do with a lot less of it. I do not want to dwell on that, but I hope some people will take it to heart, not as a castigation but just to think before we give such enthusiastic publicity or go on extravaganzas of complaining about the abuses which take place.

If I may I think I will call it six o'clock, because I want to change tack tomorrow.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. Before calling it six o'clock I want to apologize to the hon. member for Kamouraska-Rivière-du-Loup (Mr. Gendron). My understanding is that the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Kristiansen) has asked to call it six o'clock and wishes to continue his speech tomorrow.

Mr. Kristiansen: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Does the hon. member have the consent of the House to call it six o'clock?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.