

Unemployment Insurance Act

In addition, I want to tell the minister it is not only women and young people who are forced to be part-time workers today. Because of the high interest rate policies of this government and the resulting cutbacks in the construction industry, many construction workers are now employed part-time. The minister must be aware of this, and he must also know that the measures he is proposing in these amendments are misdirected and perpetuate further the injustices to our employed and unemployed, and do nothing to treat the root cause of the problem.

An hon. Member: He doesn't care.

Mr. Young: He doesn't care. The solution to the problems of unemployment will not be found in this government continuing to blame the unemployed for their own unemployment, or by shifting the costs of unemployment on to the backs of people who are fortunate enough to continue to be employed. The problems of unemployment will not go away by government officials distorting the facts about people who claim unemployment insurance benefits, or by continuing the myth that there is wholesale abuse of the system.

I picked up a newspaper the other day and saw that we are again about to be swamped with more horror stories on unemployment insurance abuse. In that paper there is an advertisement, inserted by the minister's department, and in huge black type it says: "A new way to detect Unemployment Insurance abuse". Generally speaking, in the text of this particular advertisement there is very little that is actually offensive, except that the average person probably took a look at that heading and came away thoroughly convinced the problems of unemployment insurance are somewhat synonymous again with people ripping off the system, when in fact the government's own figures show and prove, and I believe I am correct, that something just over 1 per cent of all claimants who collect unemployment insurance actually abuse the system. I think the hon. member for Lincoln would agree with me in that analysis of what happens under the unemployment insurance program. However, a substantial number of readers would not be left with that impression after looking at that heading. Whether or not that is intentional, the effect is to discredit the victims of unemployment, and is not justified by the facts, nor is this strategy used by the commission at all recent.

In the report I spoke about earlier from the Social Planning Council of metropolitan Toronto, they also found at that time that this same pattern the Unemployment Insurance Commission and the Department of Employment and Immigration are following today has been in existence for at least the last three or four years. I rather suspect, based on my experience before coming to this House, that the pressure which is applied on people drawing unemployment insurance was really created by the Conservative party in this House after 1972 when it created so much pressure on commission officials they started wholesale cutting off of people claiming benefits which were rightfully theirs, and in fact stigmatized people who found

themselves unemployed with no other source of income except unemployment insurance benefits.

For the education of the minister, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read into the record the findings of the Social Planning Council of metropolitan Toronto in the statement released at that time headed "The Problem is Jobs . . . Not People". That Social Planning Council said—

An hon. Member: You had better wake up the minister first.

Mr. Young: If he reads it in *Hansard* it will educate him equally as well as listening to me. That council said:

There is a pattern of citing individual cases of abuse and representing them as the universe. This is improper and irresponsible. Abuse is a relatively small problem for not only unemployment insurance but all income security programs. We do not assume all parents are child abusers or all taxpayers are tax abusers. We should not assume all the unemployed are insurance abusers. There is evidence that the limits of acceptability in controlling abuse have been far exceeded. The administration of unemployment insurance requires more socially acceptable forms of efficiency controls and an orientation that does not blame the victims of unemployment for their situation.

Unemployment insurance is an income security program conditioned upon unemployment. As such it has important implications for family and child welfare. Cutbacks in the levels and access to unemployment insurance are unjustified attempts to punish all of the unemployed who are collecting benefits.

● (1650)

On that statement, Mr. Speaker, I thoroughly agree.

Mr. Huntington: Who wrote it?

Mr. Young: The Social Planning Council of metropolitan Toronto. I would be happy to provide the hon. member with a copy if it would be beneficial to him.

Attempts to refinance the unemployment insurance program through more extensive employer-employee contributions are both attempts to finance a social program through a regressive form of taxation, and an abrogation by the government of its legitimate responsibility for unemployment and its causes. Structural and seasonal unemployment results not from the normal operation of the employer-employee relationship, but from economic forces which the federal government has a responsibility to control.

The unemployment insurance system introduced in 1971 recognized the government's responsibility for the costs of unemployment by underwriting the costs of initial benefits resulting from an unemployment rate of over 4 per cent. That measure made it clear that the government was responsible for controlling unemployment, and it provided an incentive for the government to keep the unemployment rate down. Now the government is completely abrogating its responsibility. Unemployment insurance is seen by this government as a substitute for job-creation measures, and to follow such a policy, in my view, is to court disaster.

No unemployment insurance scheme can withstand the pressures created by massive and sustained unemployment, nor should it be expected to. The shell game that this government and that party continually play with unemployment, the cost of unemployment and the people of Canada, is really quite shameful. Unemployment insurance is social insurance. It