

honestly say that at the present time administration of the unemployment insurance program is lax.

There are those in my constituency, particularly from some of the smaller towns in the northern end, who have taken a very aggressive stand toward unemployment insurance. They say, for example, that all kinds of people are drawing benefits when they should not be entitled to do so. According to them, some people are getting more money from unemployment insurance than they would be getting if they worked for a living. Where, they ask, is the incentive to work?

Well, Madam Speaker, I have personally looked into the cases of more than 200 people who were reported to be drawing benefits to which they were not entitled. Of those 200, I found that only five had even applied for benefits; one person was receiving benefits quite legitimately during her pregnancy and another was in the process of being disqualified for failure actively to seek work. When, out of 200 cases, one finds that only one person was receiving benefits which were questionable, and that even he had been detected and was being disqualified, I cannot believe there are many commissions which are better administered than this one.

Farming operations in my riding vary widely, and I am well aware of the problems raised by the hon. member for Norfolk-Haldimand. It is true some farmers ask why it is justifiable to pay unemployment benefits to people at a time when farmers cannot get sufficient labour to meet their needs. Surely, they feel, there should be some meeting ground, some possible compromise. There are those who suggest that applicants for benefits should be forced to pick fruit or tobacco. But when one discusses the issue with farmers in some depth, it is apparent that the farmers themselves are not all on one side of the argument. They cannot blame workers accustomed to getting between \$3 and \$6 an hour, as is the case with many employed in the automobile industry, quitting temporary work in the fields to go back to their old jobs when the recall comes.

After all, the main and most reliable source of help in farming areas comes from the people who work regularly in the fields and orchards at harvest time. If it were not for them and for the help made available through the offshore employment program, the situation today would be a great deal worse than it is.

I do not know what to think about the hon. member's suggestion that those who work intermittently as farm labourers should be exempt from the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act. A good many farmers will argue that if it were not for unemployment insurance payments enabling workers to live between jobs, it might be even more difficult to get help since they, the farmers, could not afford to hire men on a year-round basis. I would want to look at this proposition in depth before I could agree with it.

At the same time, I am all in favour of seeing a more simple method adopted to handle the bookkeeping, and the paperwork so as to relieve the farmer of these tasks as much as possible. It is the mechanics of administration that the majority of farmers find so irksome—the paperwork—rather than the actual deductions which must be made from the pay of employees. I rather doubt that the hon. member found legitimate arguments in support of

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some of the points he raised. The vast majority of these people in my riding have worked long and well. These people do not come to make a claim voluntarily. They come forward because they have some financial difficulty and they need these benefits. I have the greatest sympathy in the world for the person who has been employed for 20 years and finds, on a Friday, that he is out of work and has to make a claim. This is a very traumatic period in his life.

• (1730)

When we are talking about tightening up unemployment insurance, decreasing benefits and increasing qualifying periods, we must be very sensitive to this situation. This is particularly true when we are talking about the principal wage earner of a household, male or female. Such an individual is not likely to be at the higher level of income but usually is at the lower level, and is forced to live from pay cheque to pay cheque. All of a sudden, that individual finds there is no pay cheque coming, and as a result, there ensues a very traumatic and emotional period of time in that person's life.

If we set the qualifying period at eight or at 30 weeks I would then ask how the commission will handle this situation. This will cause emotional stress and will place a great load on municipal welfare schemes. One county council suggested that the qualifying period for unemployment insurance should be set at 30 weeks, if I recall correctly. I think that county council should be asked whether it would be prepared to share the costs of these joint programs with the provinces in order to fund these people for that length of time. Perhaps when they look at the size of the financial commitment they would be taking on, they will alter their view.

There are a couple of other points I want to make. I am not terribly satisfied with the basis for our unemployment statistics. Perhaps this is not germane to the topic of the resolution but, as I understand it now, during each period some 30,000 households are solicited to find out if people are unemployed and actively looking for work. That is how our unemployment figures are determined on a percentage basis. These statistics should be more definitive, and if the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Gillespie) were here, I would suggest to him that he ask Statistics Canada to see if there is any better way of determining them.

I would like to know, for instance, the number of households where the principal wage earner is unemployed. I think that might be different than the number of unemployed second or third persons contributing to the economy of that household. Perhaps consideration might be given to a more sensitive benefit structure, with increased benefits to the principal wage earner in a household as opposed to someone who is casually attached to the working force.

Let me also comment on a problem that seems to be at the crux of unemployment insurance difficulties at the present time. This involves the sorting out of claims and cheques that are justifiably issued to the claimants. The people in the Unemployment Insurance Commission and in the unions, as well as those representing non-union people, will have to work even harder than they are at the present time in helping people to establish their initial