

resulted in unconscionable delays in the processing of veterans' claims.

● (1540)

Lay-offs continue in great numbers and in industries which the government was able to forecast. Again I use the automobile industry as an example. Applications for unemployment insurance are being processed through local unemployment insurance offices and then forwarded to Belleville for card clearance entitlement. Unemployment insurance officials are already working overtime, not only during weekdays but on weekends as well. Some of them are publicly complaining about continued stress and pressure in the system, but the important point is that the commission is not geared, as it should be, to process claims of unemployed people with any degree of reasonable efficiency or expediency. Cards of entitlement have not yet been received in the community of St. Catharines for lay-offs which occurred as late as January 10, and thousands more workers have been laid off since that date. A backlog of hardship and suffering is being borne by terminated and unemployed workers whom the Unemployment Insurance Commission is supposed to assist.

I should like to return to the problems which in my view exist in the bill. If an unemployed worker qualifies for insurance, it becomes a mutual problem between him and the government, through the unemployment insurance agency, to find new employment. Apart from simply finding the worker a new job, the Unemployment Insurance Commission now has the responsibility, as it should have had before, to try three additional avenues—retraining, mobility grants and/or a portable wage structure arrangement. Should all these avenues fail to produce new employment, individuals are faced with the prospect of unemployment insurance benefits expiring and of no other income being available except welfare. Indeed it is frightening; it is even a humiliating experience for a senior person to endure. It is not the fault of the worker. He is not responsible for the government's high interest rate policy or its disastrous budget. It is not the fault of the worker that the government has failed to do what the nation expected it to do—to provide some forward planning and to develop an industrial strategy which would keep people working.

Bill C-78 recognizes this deficiency in government by taking into account an additional avenue of approach. After all else has failed, the worker will be given an early retirement. In order to accomplish this, the legislation proposes the establishment of a Labour Adjustment Review Board which has all the appearances of being totally unnecessary and unjustified. With a little more refinement and time, the board might have been eliminated from the bill, but it is still with us. Its chore will be to investigate lay-offs which the Unemployment Insurance Commission went through earlier and to determine whether or not unemployed workers qualify under the provisions of Bill C-78, with which I will deal in a minute. As the unemployed person reaches the end of his or her unemployment insurance benefits and is still without job prospect, the commission would draw the case to the attention of the board which would then decide whether or not the lay-off is within an industry desig-

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nated under the provisions of the act and whether the individual qualifies for benefits under the act.

Let us assume that the lay-off and the individual both qualify. The board would then recommend that the individual be placed on early retirement, and it would be up to the UIC to implement the decision or investigate further. Assuming all goes well, the individual would be placed on early retirement and paid a pension up to a maximum amount of \$210 per week, indexed to the consumer price index, which pension would continue as long as the employee is under age 65.

From time to time my daughter accuses me of being less than clear when explaining how bureaucracy works. Despite my deliberate efforts to set out clearly and specifically how the program will work, it is obvious that it is mired in red tape and bureaucracy, which of necessity reduces its effectiveness. Under the legislation an applicant must be 54 years of age and have worked for at least ten of the last 15 years and for at least 1,000 hours in each of the ten years.

I listened to the presentation of the minister a few moments ago. He indicated that there will be some flexibility. This arose only as a result of representations made in committee. Such flexibility in terms of 1,000 hours per year is a necessity. A 54-year-old person with a family and with such a record of service should not be subjected to endless applications, interviews and investigations, to satisfy the government's unrepentant obsession with red tape and bureaucracy. He has already endured a tragedy—the loss of his job. He has already spent a frustrating year or more under the guidance of UIC attempting to find an alternate form of employment and going through the alternative avenues to which he is now subjected. Once that is done, with cap in hand he goes to another bureaucrat in some other commission or board to ask for further assistance, whether he qualifies under the act or will receive welfare. We submit that this is a totally unnecessary and degrading step which the bill could eliminate without any loss of substance.

We raised this point in committee and we were assured by the Minister of Labour and his deputy minister that our fears were groundless. They said that it will not be bureaucratic, that it will work as smoothly and efficiently as they promised. Time will tell on that score, but as the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Crombie) pointed out a number of times, as Members of Parliament we will be very busy explaining how the program will work and writing letters to the UIC, to the board and to the minister showing where the system will bog down in bureaucracy. With lay-offs of over 2,000 at a time becoming all too common, there will be many letters and telephone calls.

I should like to return to the many "ifs" which I raised earlier and to start with the first step. What happens to a laid-off worker when he or she has finally made it through the red tape involved in obtaining unemployment insurance? Earlier this week two representatives of the senior citizens, "Action Now" association met with a number of Conservative Members of Parliament. They stated flatly that if one was over 45 years of age, one should not go to the Unemployment