

Unemployment Insurance

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Ricard: There will never be such a thing.

Mr. Kucherepa: That could never happen.

Mr. Peters: If the hon. member wants to make a speech I will be quite happy to curtail my remarks so that he can rise and make it. He never makes a speech except from his seat, and it sounds like it.

The new expert on the unemployment insurance fund, the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway, goes on to say:

The situation which has arisen at the present time makes it impossible to administer it properly, and with the paying out within the terms of the act that is being done, nothing could happen to the fund but its depletion.

I do not want to go into all the financial charges that have been made, because I am inclined to believe the minister who said this afternoon that there would have been little difference in the financial arrangements no matter what government had been in power, because there had been only one change in the staff which administers this act. I presume the minister meant the administration of the financial aspects of it. While it certainly has not been advantageous it is not necessarily the responsibility of this government.

The hon. member points out:

The situation which has arisen at the present time makes it impossible to administer it properly—

Again, what he is saying is that you cannot administer the Unemployment Insurance Act properly if you have not more money going into it than is going out of it, and because we have not made the arrangements which he is suggesting by bringing in all the people who could not possibly find themselves in the position of being unemployed, we are not properly arranging matters. The fund is being depleted at the present time precisely because we are carrying people it was not anticipated would be carried when the act was passed. It was not contemplated that they would be carried, because at that time the people believed it was an insurance fund to cover only a limited amount of unemployment of casual or very short duration. The hon. member goes on to say:

It then becomes a question of how the fund could be built up. The opposition has suggested, as I say, that the federal government should simply contribute a large amount of money to reimburse the fund.

That is not altogether true. The part of the opposition to which I belong, the efficient opposition, does say this, but I do not believe the official opposition has made any such statement that the government should put in the full amount needed.

[Mr. Peters.]

An hon. Member: We have said that since 1958.

Mr. Peters: In that case I stand corrected. I should only try to speak for that part of the opposition which I represent. The hon. member went on to say:

Many people now drawing out of the fund should not be drawing out of it, and many people who should be able to qualify to draw out of the fund are not now qualified to draw out of it, nor do they pay into it.

Good heavens, why should they draw out of it if they do not pay into it? This is an insurance fund, not a charity organization. It is not a dole. If they do not pay into it, why should they draw out? Sometimes we hear complaints from people who pay into it but who are nevertheless not eligible to draw out of the fund, and these are justifiable complaints. I hear occasionally suggestions from my constituents that because they have paid into the fund for many years and received no benefits from it they should be entitled to pay at a reduced rate as one does in the case of car insurance when there have been no claims. There is some merit in that idea.

As to that statement by the hon. member that many people who should be able to qualify to draw out of the fund are not now qualified to draw out of it, I hope that is not the impression which the Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr) holds. I hope the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway is speaking for himself, because this suggestion would mean the end of the fund and would put many people on the dole. There used to be a dole. That is how it was done in days gone by. Money was contributed by the federal government and they paid workers during the depression 20 cents a day to build airports all over the country; those engaged on building roads received a packet of tobacco once a week. This was a contribution by the federal government.

We are suggesting now that the government should make a much more substantial contribution in the form of a payment to the fund to compensate only for that portion of the outgoing which was not anticipated when the fund was set up originally on an actuarial basis. Present economic conditions—the recession, the depression, call it what you will—which now exist, are not the responsibility of the unemployed people of Canada but the responsibility of the government and, in a way, of the people as a whole because everyone in this country, really, in the last analysis, constitutes the government and should take the responsibility of replenishing the fund. As the head of the insurance branch indicated two years ago, approximately \$500,000 would be considered a safe and sensible sum, though, of course, conditions have changed since then.