

Unemployment Insurance Act

should be done to compensate him for all the money he has paid into the insurance fund.

That is all I have to say, but I would ask the minister a question which I should like to have him answer. He said, in this letter to me, that the premium which would have to be paid by the individual would be considerably greater than it is now. As far as sickness is concerned, possibly that is so. I am asking, however, about people who have accidents of one kind or another and not people who suffer in the ordinary course of employment. That is taken care of by workmen's compensation. How much more would such people as I have in mind have to pay? How much would the premium be increased to take care of that situation?

Motion agreed to and the house went into committee, Mr. Golding in the chair.

Mr. PEARKE: There is one matter which I would bring to the minister's attention and on which I would ask him a question. I refer to a group of employees in the coal mines on Vancouver island, known as fire bosses. These employees are hired on a monthly salary, and from time to time their salary has been increased as a result of increases in wages paid to miners who are working in their gangs. Quite recently there has been an unfortunate cessation of work in the Nanaimo coal fields. The result has been that wages were increased to the miners, but it has also resulted in a corresponding increase in the monthly wages paid to the fire bosses. As a consequence, the fire bosses are no longer eligible for unemployment insurance, owing to the ceiling of, I believe, \$3,120 a year, which is the maximum salary a monthly employee may draw if he is to obtain unemployment insurance.

I should like to read a paragraph from a letter I received from the secretary of the fire bosses' union, because I think it explains the case very well. I quote:

We have been in and out of the confines of this act at various times since it came into operation. For example, we contributed continuously from June 7, 1941, until December 23, 1943, when an increase in our monthly salary placed us in an exempted class. Since that time we again contributed for a short time in 1946. Then again in November, 1947, to present date. Since our monthly salary rises with miner's wages, any increase granted to end the present strike will again place us in the exempted class.

Now our complaint is, that although at present out of work due to the miner's strike we have been denied benefits for what we paid in between 1941-43. In 1944 we made strenuous efforts to continue our payments but were ruled out because we were on a monthly salary basis and were above the yearly ceiling set by the government.

[Mr. Ross (St. Paul's).]

My question is this. Do the amendments now being introduced raise the monthly ceiling?

Mr. MITCHELL: The amount has been raised from \$2,400 to \$3,120 per annum.

Mr. PEARKE: In these amendments?

Mr. MITCHELL: Yes.

Mr. KNOWLES: I should like to ask the minister to comment on three points which were raised at a previous stage of the debate. First of all, I would ask him to say a word about sickness, but in raising the matter now I would ask him to follow me closely and to realize that I am not now asking him about the broad issue of an over-all scheme which might be called health insurance in general. I am asking now with specific reference to the kind of case which the hon. member for Vancouver East brought up and which is fairly common, the case of an insured person becoming unemployed, qualifying for benefits and becoming the recipient of benefits, but being taken ill later while in receipt of benefits. The minister knows that when that happens the recipient's benefits are cut off, even though there is still no employment for him. I am not asking the minister to go into the broad picture of health insurance at this time, but I hope he will comment on this point.

It seems to me that some amendment might have been made to the act at this time to provide that such a person who is receiving benefits shall continue to receive them, even though he may be taken ill during that period of time.

The second matter on which I would ask the minister to comment is that concerning which representations have been made to him from time to time, particularly the representations from the Winnipeg and district trades and labour council to which I referred earlier this evening, having to do with suitable employment.

Again, I am not going into details such as we have gone into before with respect to the directives sent out, such as those referred to by the hon. member for Red Deer. I am referring to the general fact that there is a section in the act covering the matter.

The third point I would ask the minister to comment upon is the request from labour bodies for increasing the number of umpires from one to at least three.

Mr. MITCHELL: My hon. friend says he does not want me to cover the broad question of sickness insurance. You have to do so.