

Unemployment Insurance Office Conditions

very large, and the very fact that a person with a family of five or six children to feed and clothe has to wait three weeks for his unemployment insurance is intolerable.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Baldwin: Thirty-buck Benson.

Mr. Hales: The new office which Toronto is to have will not be ready until next year so that the unemployed in the area will have to manage with just one office for the rest of the year. It is regrettable that the Unemployment Insurance Commission did not have sufficient foresight to prepare itself for the present situation. I am glad to hear that the minister is doing the best he can under the circumstances.

Mr. Andrew Brewin (Greenwood): Mr. Speaker, I am naturally delighted at the minister's announcement which indicates a sensitive reaction to the criticism by members of the opposition of the situation which has developed in regard to unemployment insurance in light of the very substantially increased numbers of unemployed. I think the figure is over 30 per cent in Metropolitan Toronto, which indicates a much larger increase than the usual seasonal one.

It seems to me it is of the utmost importance in this as in other fields where the individual citizen confronts the state or its representatives that he be assured that his rights and his feelings are being treated with respect. Justice should not only be done but should be seen to be done. Employment in today's world is so important, both to the maintenance of income and to the maintenance of self-respect, that unemployment is a traumatic experience.

In the past, as I know very well myself and as the minister's statement indicated, unemployed people have been subjected to delay, frustration and discomfort because of their difficulties in completing forms, in attending inadequately staffed offices and in having to wait in line and often to return from time to time. There are other problems such as transportation which may seem small but are serious when there is only one small office for a vast area like Metropolitan Toronto. These problems will have to be considered.

I am very pleased that steps have been taken and are being taken to remedy the

[Mr. Hales.]

situation, and I sincerely hope they will be effective.

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, we are also pleased with the measures that have just been announced by the Minister of Labour who is responsible for Unemployment Insurance offices.

Many members have been aware of the problems concerning unemployment insurance for a long time. We are happy to learn that the minister is ready to take the necessary steps in order to make the application forms for benefits understandable to citizens of various ethnic groups who have to deal with Unemployment Insurance offices.

However, the statement made me realize as it did for the previous speakers that the problems about unemployment insurance are increasing because of technical reasons, but also because of the present economic conditions in Canada. In fact, the Minister of Labour can improve the methods, personnel and working conditions in the Unemployment Insurance offices with a view to providing better services to the claimants; however, if the economic conditions deteriorate before the department has been able to achieve the proposed improvements, we will keep on losing ground.

I must also recognize that the Unemployment Insurance Commission, the subject dealt with by the minister just now, has installed long-distance telephone systems in some cities, in order to allow the claimants to describe their problems more readily to UIC officials.

Besides, UIC officials have told us that the Department went too fast in establishing a Canada-wide system of computers in regional offices, particularly in larger centers such as Montreal which covers the whole province of Quebec.

They say also that the computer system was initiated prematurely and in too many places at once, instead of limiting it to one region in order to detect its flaws and then confidently establishing it in the other regions.

Before closing, Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister to see that the computers operate as soon as possible in order that the thousands of claims which have been pending for weeks or months may be settled.