

*Unemployment Insurance*

fact that what is really needed is not an improvement in the Unemployment Insurance Act but a policy to provide employment.

May I point out also, if the minister will permit me to do so, that the details, of which he gave us a forecast in his speech, indicate that for large numbers of people who will have to get along on supplementary amounts at these low rates, even these rates will not be available to them for the whole period of their unemployment. It will be available to them only for such number of days as they can qualify. In no case can they draw these supplementary benefits beyond April 15 of this year or March 31 of any other year.

But the House of Commons must not assume that these 70,000, or so, referred to, or the other 25,000, are going to receive even those low rates I have quoted up until April 15 of this year. They will get them only for the number of days for which they can qualify under the new part being added to the act.

The minister has said that there would be four classes. The first class would be the person who has qualified for benefits and has been drawing benefits, but whose period of qualification has been exhausted. He will be entitled to these low rates I have indicated for a period equal to the period for which he qualified previously. That previous period might be only 36 days, which is one-fifth of the minimum requirement of 180 days of work. Thus there is no guarantee that he will get even these low rates for the full time he is unemployed.

In class two we have reference to those who cannot meet the requirements of 180 days in the last two years. They will be permitted to qualify if they have had 90 days since March 31 last. But the person who meets that minimum qualification will get the low rates I have quoted for a period of only 18 days. Well, 18 days at those weekly rates will not see an unemployed person and his family through a winter in this country.

The same applies to class three. Those in lumbering and logging who previously were in excepted occupations can now qualify, provided they have had 90 days' employment in the last twelve months. But the person who meets that minimum requirement would be able to get this so-called supplementary benefit at the low rate I have quoted for a period of only 18 days, or one-fifth of that 90-day period.

The same applies to those in class four, who are engaged in employment that has been brought into a state of insurability within the last twelve months.

I know the government becomes impatient with our forever finding that every time

[Mr. Knowles.]

they take a small step forward they do not go far enough. But if ever that criticism was justified, then certainly it is with respect to this measure. This is a pitifully small amount of relief offered, as I say, at rates lower than those paid by the public welfare department in the city from which I come; and it is no credit at all to the government to bring it in at this time.

I felt when the minister was reading the statement the impression was being gained in some parts of the house—"Well, here is something pretty good; here is something that will at least provide some dollars and cents for these people." The hon. member for Fort William (Mr. McIvor) talked about the money that will be put into circulation, the purchasing power. But please note that the people who cannot meet these new qualifications do not qualify at all; those who have been unemployed too long and need it the worst do not get anything out of this legislation. In other words, any notion that this additional part of the act, with these supplementary benefits, is going to provide even a kind of living sufficient to tide people over, these hundreds of thousands of unemployed in this country at the present time, is completely false and erroneous.

While I am speaking on this subject let me say it seems to me there is something strange about the way in which daily premiums are to be increased. If I understood the minister correctly he said it was to be one cent a day. Well, I shall wait until we have the details before us; but I hope he did not mean one cent a day across the board. Because, if he did, that is an increase of 50 per cent in the amount to be paid by those in the lower brackets and an increase of only 14-2/7 per cent on the part of those in the upper brackets.

Here again we have a case of this government's paying so little on the dollar. They are a great organization to make promises and then, years later, to come through with just a portion of what they promised. I hold in my hand a copy of a document frequently quoted in the house, the report of the dominion-provincial conference of 1945 and 1946. I find at page 387 that the prime minister of that day, the Right Hon. W. L. Mackenzie King, making his statement summing up the government's proposals, said this about unemployment assistance:

In addition to unemployment insurance, the dominion will set up a system of unemployment assistance under which it will pay benefits equal to 85 per cent of unemployment insurance benefits, to unemployed persons able and willing to work who are not entitled, or who have ceased to be entitled, to unemployment insurance benefits. This assistance will be limited to two years of continuous