

Inquiries of the Ministry
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

MEASURES TO ASSIST INELIGIBLE UNEMPLOYED

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I caught the Minister of Labour out of position. A few days ago I asked the Prime Minister whether certain actions would be taken because of the indication that approximately 70,000 unemployed persons in Canada are not eligible for unemployment insurance. The Minister of Labour has no doubt had an opportunity to study this question fully. Has the minister conducted an investigation into the reasons for this gap? What measures does he propose to take to lessen the obvious hardship that will result in the difficult winter ahead which even that very sanguine optimist, the Minister of Finance, forecasts?

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I will try to deal with all the questions raised. First of all, I think the precise figure of 77,000 was probably arrived at by subtracting the number of people eligible for unemployment insurance from those who are declared unemployed. This was in the month of November. I think the figures will be substantially reduced following the coming into effect of the seasonal benefits on December 1. What is the reason for the gap? Under the present law too many Canadians are not covered because of the fact that the present plan is not universal in scope. Many of those unemployed are not eligible for various reasons. They may be unemployed school teachers or unemployed politicians. In any event, they are not eligible for unemployment insurance. The Leader of the Opposition asked what we intend to do about this situation. We will be introducing a very progressive bill that will remove these inequalities.

Mr. Stanfield: Has a study been conducted to ascertain approximately how many of the more than 70,000 persons are ineligible for unemployment insurance because they do not qualify under existing conditions or have not worked the required amount of time this year?

Mr. Mackasey: Under the present Unemployment Insurance Act, Mr. Speaker, eligibility is fairly stringent. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition will be happy to know that under the proposed legislation unemployed persons will be eligible after a period of eight weeks. In addition to helping the bulk of the 77,000 this will also help young people entering the work force for the first time.

Mr. Stanfield: As it is evident that the minister does not intend to take substantial action this winter, does he intend to make any recommendations to close the gap that obviously exists between the Unemployment Insurance Commission and the Department of Manpower and Immigration inasmuch as it is clear that no one in the government has the specific responsibility of looking after the interests of these people?

[Translation]

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. Minister of Labour a supplementary question.

[Mr. Basford.]

As many of the 77,000 unemployed young people are ineligible for unemployment insurance benefits because they have not yet been on the labour market, can the hon. minister tell us whether he intends shortly to take action to enable these young people to live decently, in spite of the opposition expressed by the Progressive Conservative party and the New Democratic party last night in this House?

[English]

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, I think the only way to remedy the defect in the present Act, which makes it virtually impossible for young people entering the work force for the first time to receive benefits, is to give speedy passage to the new legislation which will—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. It seems to me that we are now resuming the debate which raged all day yesterday.

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[Translation]

BANKRUPTCY ACT

PRESENTATION OF AMENDING BILL

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs.

Does the hon. minister believe he will soon be able to introduce in this House a bill providing for a revision of the Bankruptcy Act as he has been promising repeatedly over several years?

[English]

Hon. Ron Basford (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs): I know the hon. member is very interested in this matter and I am pleased to advise him that I anticipate tabling the report at eleven o'clock on Friday morning.

[Translation]

Mr. Rondeau: Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question.

In view of the statement made by the Minister of Justice of Quebec to the effect that he wants to fight the Mafia efficiently, does the hon. minister feel he can give the House the assurance that the new legislation will make it possible to fight the Mafia through deeds and not through mere wishes, pious wishes, as has been the case in the past with previous acts?

[English]

Mr. Basford: Over the last two years, since I have been minister, a great many improvements have been made in the Bankruptcy Act—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Basford:—but I am looking to the report which I shall be tabling on Friday to recommend other ways of revising the Bankruptcy Act to make it more effective in dealing with manipulation of the bankruptcy laws and fraudulent bankruptcies. I hope the report will have very useful recommendations to make on this subject.