

Unemployment Insurance Act

and I do not intend to debate this matter fully. But as I read the resolution a doubt arises in my mind that I would convey to the Minister of Labour to see whether it can be clarified. There is no doubt that this is only a portion of the many submissions that were made in respect to the Unemployment Insurance Act by the Trades and Labour Congress, the Canadian Congress of Labour and hon. members during the last session of parliament, urging the government to make some changes in the Unemployment Insurance Act in order to make more benefits available to the working people of this country. An increase in supplementary benefits was only one of these, and it is certainly most welcome. It is our hope that the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act will bring some benefit when they are introduced in the house.

There is also no question of the urgency of this matter. That is borne out by the fact that the government has broken into the debate on the speech from the throne in order to introduce this resolution and the amendment itself, which leads me to believe that because of the urgency of the matter it should have been brought in at the last session of parliament so that the people who are sorely in need of assistance at this time would have received it by now.

The resolution and its contents are most acceptable. As I read the resolution, I find it suggests that the supplementary benefits be increased to the present rates of regular benefits. The present rates are as outlined in the act. Over the last number of years we have been urging this government to close up the gap between the supplementary benefits and the regular benefits, so that there would be no variation, since a person out of work certainly needs as much money in supplementary benefits as he would receive in regular benefits.

The doubt in my mind at the present time has to do with amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act. When they are brought in will they include certain changes in the regular benefits? If so, after this resolution is passed and the supplementary benefits are raised to the present rate of the regular benefits, will there again be that variation between the increased regular benefits and the supplementary benefits as amended? If so, I do not think that the discrepancy should exist. The supplementary benefits should be again brought up to whatever increase is made in the regular benefits.

The period of time from January 1 to April 15 has proven to be of short duration. It is not sufficient to take care of the people out

[Mr. Starr.]

of work during that period of time. As an example, we in Oshawa found last year that when the rolls showed a decrease in the number of registered unemployed of something like 600 or 700 they were the people who on April 15 were cut off supplementary benefits, but work was still not available. Contracting work was not in progress and construction had not started. Therefore, those people were left stranded without any financial assistance whatever from April 15 to some time toward the end of May. I strongly urge that the Minister of Labour consider the extension of time for supplementary benefits beyond April 15; my suggestion would be to May 15.

Mr. Cameron (Nanaimo): Mr. Chairman, I was quite interested to hear the comments of the previous speakers on this particular measure. Like, I suppose, every other hon. member in this house, I welcome this very belated action on the part of the government, but I welcome it, Mr. Chairman, in the same spirit in which I receive gratefully an aspirin when I have a headache, being under no illusions whatsoever that it is going to cure the cause of the headache.

I must say I got a certain sardonic entertainment out of listening to the exponents of free enterprise standing on their feet here demanding that the government depart from the true milk of the word, of the religion of free enterprise. When I heard the hon. member for Broadview quoting the late Right Hon. William Lyon Mackenzie King I thought it was a very risky thing for him to do because of course somebody could get up and quote the late Lord Bennett on the same problem of unemployment.

I think, sir, we shall have to recognize that we are now entering a period of history when these problems are going to continue and are going to become more and more acute, and we are going to have to do something else than merely provide bigger and better aspirins for the headaches that are going to afflict our economy in the future. It is like most of the measures of this very old Dickensian government; it is a Micawber-like measure. It is going to extend the benefits of unemployment insurance in the hope that something will turn up before the new extensions are exhausted. But no one suggests what is likely to turn up; no one suggests that anything should turn up; no one suggests that we have any reason to believe that this condition will improve by itself.

Like the hon. member for Broadview, I should like also to quote a departed Canadian statesman, another Liberal statesman, who