

Speech from the Throne

computer system for issuing cheques and return to the manual operation. I even went so far as to suggest he could use the computer, if he had no other use for it, as a ship's anchor in the Bay of Quinte.

It turned out the other day that there were 300 cheques which had no names or addresses on them. The computer was supposed to handle 90 per cent of the unemployment insurance claims for the province of Ontario. What has it handled? It has handled 34 per cent. Last week in this House of Commons we were informed that the computer at Belleville was to handle 5,000 claims which could not be processed in the province of Quebec. When it cannot process the claims for the province of Ontario, I cannot understand why we should import business for it from another province.

I have a case involving a lady who applied for unemployment insurance on September 26 and who did not receive it until last week. When I inquired about her complaint I was informed by the Unemployment Insurance Commission at the computer centre in Belleville that they had lost the records and could not find them. The computer at Belleville broke down and it was necessary to employ 250 extra people. There was no other place in which to house them so they were housed in an old bowling alley with two washrooms and two exit doors.

One can understand some of the problems in respect of unemployment insurance claims when people work in such conditions and in some cases are inexperienced. I think the staff in the district offices of the Unemployment Insurance Commission try their best. They work long hours in their efforts to sort out claims. This is the situation especially at Christmas time. I am not throwing the blame on the local area offices; it lies right here at the head office.

I believe the time is long overdue when something should be done about the situation. We might ask ourselves what we should expect when a computer is reprogrammed two or three times a month. This is what is going on. This is what happens in respect of the computer for Ontario which is located in Belleville. They are having difficulty in respect of the computer again. What are we to do now? I have correspondence from people, but time does not permit it to be placed on the record of the House. However, I would mention one or two cases.

One letter states that after 24 phone calls and a delay of two months the people concerned finally received their unemployment insurance. I have another case involving a very honest individual who tried unsuccessfully for weeks and weeks to receive his unemployment insurance benefit. He was unable to obtain any answers. Last Tuesday he received a cheque for eight weeks' benefits, in the amount of \$450. Fortunately, he had returned to work. The unemployment insurance office had confirmed by telephone that he was working. On February 18 he also received four more cheques, which I have in my hand, for \$574 for which he had made no claim and was not entitled to do so. In the first instance he had applied for unemployment insurance as a single man. However, according to the computer he was a married man and therefore he received \$574 for the same period for which he had received \$450. I assure the House that I intend to make sure that these four cheques are returned to the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

We have asked the government to deal with this very deplorable situation which is plaguing the people of this fair country of ours from coast to coast. We have heard of demonstrations in every province, and yet the government has not seen fit to let us deal with the situation which has caused misery and suffering to many people, especially at Christmas time. In many cases these people probably do not have sufficient money to carry them over a period of three or four weeks. These are honest and sincere people. I venture to say that every member of this House in days to come will be plagued by constituents who say they are being asked to pay back unemployment insurance money which they received in the form of overpayments.

So much for the Unemployment Insurance Commission. Now I shall move to the comments of the hon. member for Bruce (Mr. Whicher) in his speech in respect of the old age pensioners. He stated—and I do not have any argument with this—that 600,000 of our senior citizens receive \$135 a month as a single person, or \$255 per month as married couples at age 65. Then he threw in his dig about the Tory party when it was in power not seeing fit to lower the age. I want to remind him that it was the Tory party which gave them more than the six-buck boys did in days gone by. I do not think he stopped to think about a single individual attempting to live on \$135 a month and keep up a home. He may say no individual should be living alone in this day and age. However, I cannot go along with that. I realize it is much more expensive to keep up a house if a person is receiving only \$135 a month, but I still respect that individual's right to live in a home which he has enjoyed for many years.

The hon. member also dealt with the medical coverage which our senior citizens over age 65 are receiving. I believe thanks should go to the province of Ontario for exempting from contribution people over age 65. I venture to say the time is coming when we must consider bringing down the age to 60 instead of 65. He went on to describe at some length the situation of the war veteran. He stated that a single pensioner on a full pension now receives \$292 per month, whereas a veteran with a wife and three children receives \$460 per month. This may be very true, but I point out how difficult it is for a veteran to receive the full pension. I could mention a little later veterans who are disabled, who have been laid up with injuries and who are receiving amounts a long way below \$460. I should like to quote from a magazine called *Fragment*. This magazine is published by War Amputations of Canada and it states in part:

Veterans across Canada must unite in their efforts to gain maximum benefits from the federal government, which too long has been making veterans dance to the tune of politicians.

• (2130)

I quote from an address given by Mr. Chadderton of War Amputations of Canada. He quoted the case of a paraplegic veteran whose spine was damaged by a German machine-gun bullet on D-Day and who receives only \$1,600 out of a maximum of \$2,400 under the exceptional incapacity allowance. The executive secretary of the War Amputees Association said that benefits in 1919 amounted to the same as wages received by basic civil servants. The basic pension is \$3,500 a year, while the average civil service salary for the lower grades is \$4,550.