

The staff of the UIC feed these computers with cards and have to wait three or four days for results. By the time the postal service has handled these complaints another three or four days are lost. On average, I receive five or six complaints a day about the Unemployment Insurance Commission, late payments and disqualifications. Surely, all these people cannot be wrong. After I delve into their problems I usually manage to achieve something like a 95 per cent success rate. If they were wrong in the first place, how could I win their case for them? I must say that I have received a lot of co-operation from the executive assistant to the minister. I do not want to belittle the staff of the commission either, because they have been most co-operative. But their hands are tied by this massive machine which, in its own time, passes out information that is fed into it from the other end.

This is why I was disappointed to hear the minister say today that he was introducing centralization. Efficiency is not closely related to centralization, especially in this field. When this bill is sent to committee, I hope to be present and to bring up some of these matters for the attention to the minister. After all, the people most affected by its provisions are those who can least afford to be.

Another matter I would draw to the attention of the minister concerns the application forms that have to be filled out by persons who become unemployed. Probably these people are not all blessed with an education, and they cannot understand some of these complicated forms. I am sure the minister will admit that we could devise a form more readily understandable by these people. Not all of them have this difficulty but many do. I often help people who come into my office on Saturday mornings to fill out these forms. They tell me: "I do not understand this letter that I got last week telling me I am disqualified, that I do not have enough stamps, when I have been contributing for 20 years". I can produce letters like this. Again, this letter is probably the work of the computer to a great extent.

These are just a few of the matters I wanted to raise. When this bill goes to the committee, I hope serious study will be given to these problems. If so, I am sure we can produce a bill much more readily acceptable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Richard): Order. If the minister speaks now with the consent of the House he will close the debate.

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, I am torn between two responsibilities here. One of them is to get the bill through by six o'clock, realizing that this is Wednesday; the other is answering in the 10 minutes at my disposal the questions that have been raised. Or perhaps these could be left over to the committee stage when I can deal with them in detail. I do not know whether hon. members opposite desire a recorded vote before six o'clock.

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

However, I should like to answer the question that was raised by the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert), who seemed very anxious to get some information about the amount of money in the present unemployment insurance fund that is going into the Consolidated Revenue Fund at the present time and which draws interest, and will continue to do so. No change has been made in this respect, with the exception that under the new concept there will not be \$400 million or \$500 million of taxpayers' money always in the fund because the rates will be adjusted annually. The idea is for the whole plan to finance itself as it goes along. Periodically, once a year in November, we will adjust the rates according to the experience of the past year. Once we reach 1975 and the plan has accordingly been adjusted as far as the transitional period for new entrants is concerned, contributions by management and labour will be fairly stable. I have already mentioned on previous occasions that the government will absorb the extraordinary cost features of the plan which come into effect at the 4 per cent level.

There have been a lot of valid arguments made, one of which concerned the administration and service of the UIC. I have already promised, without going into this in detail at this time, that we will be restructuring UIC services when this bill becomes law. This has been a non-partisan debate in every way because everyone who has participated has been interested in this matter. I assure hon. members that the prime responsibility of civil servants and those people who work in the Unemployment Insurance Commission will be to offer a maximum service to claimants and to the employers. That is the way it should be. In order to do this we will have to reorganize personnel within the Unemployment Insurance Commission.

● (5:50 p.m.)

We cannot have things both ways; that is Members of Parliament constantly coming to us and saying do not change the set-up but at the same time wanting to make changes to benefit people.

I used the word "centralize" today, and I think that may have been ambiguous. I was, however, thinking in terms of certain functions that can be centralized. We will, in general, be decentralizing the offices in order to provide more claimant services to the people. In other words, we will be setting up more offices around the country that will specialize in providing information and assistance to claimants. We have already done this in Toronto where we have opened up five new offices. We have used the phrase "satellite offices", which might not have the best connotation, but the primary objective of the offices is to give service to the customer—the claimants.

Hon. Members of Parliament have a legitimate concern about some of the problems that have created these two and three-month waiting periods before an individual can draw unemployment insurance. In many cases there has been a reason for this, and that is the need to help a claimant build up his claim. Perhaps during the last two