

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, December 16, 1971

The House met at 2 p.m.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

NEW REGULATION DEFINING EMPLOYMENT IN CANADA BY HER MAJESTY IN RIGHT OF A PROVINCE

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, since the passage of Bill C-229 last June, an act respecting the Unemployment Insurance Act, we have been formulating within the Unemployment Insurance Commission regulations that are needed in conjunction with the new act, particularly because of the widening of the coverage to almost universality in this country. There has been some confusion at the provincial level, as indicated in conversations with several of the provinces, as to precisely what employment under Her Majesty in right of a province means, although this terminology had been used in the old act for many years.

In order to remove the ambiguity or concern as to precisely what is meant I felt it would be in the best interests of everyone that the pertinent section of the regulations which will be shortly published in the *Canada Gazette*, as to what is and what is not a civil servant should be made available immediately.

The proposed regulation reads as follows:

2. For greater certainty, employment in Canada by Her Majesty in right of a province, for the purposes of subsection (1), only includes employment in Canada of employees who are appointed and remunerated under the Public Service Act or Civil Service Act of a province or who are employed in Canada by a corporation, commission or other body that is for all purposes an agent of Her Majesty in right of the province.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I should like to state for the purpose of the record that this act as presently administered is in an awful mess. We find that the minister is now bringing before us an interpretation of a section of the act in respect of which we on this side of the House had some problems during our earlier deliberations on the bill. I remember repeatedly asking the minister, on behalf of this party, whether the province of Quebec and the other provinces were in fact satisfied with the bill, and we were continually reminded, and indeed chastised by the minister, that the bill was in order and that the provinces were willing to accept it as it stood. I understand that the province of Quebec is not now going to pay into this fund some \$20 million. I wonder whether in fact the fund is actuarially sound.

I am very concerned about the whole act. We as members are continually being asked about the payment of claims for benefits to which people are entitled. This is

not a hand-out. These people are entitled to their money. They have paid their premiums and accordingly should be able to obtain their benefits in due time.

The minister and his staff continually told us in the past that they would lengthen the waiting period to two weeks and there would be no great inconvenience. Things have not changed one bit. People are sick and tired, having paid their premiums, of having to wait six, seven, eight or nine weeks before getting their money.

• (2:10 p.m.)

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: There is something else which should concern us. Yesterday I posed a question to the minister concerning the lack of co-ordination between his department and the Department of National Revenue when drawing up regulations. Apparently regulations are being drawn up by the Department of Labour which are contrary to those being established by the Department of National Revenue. Co-ordination must be improved. I suggest the minister should spend more time on this aspect of the legislation and stake his political future on the workability of the Unemployment Insurance Act rather than concern himself about technological changes which will probably not be discussed until some time next year. We might then have an Unemployment Insurance Act which would be credible, viable, and more useful to all concerned.

I trust the minister will make every effort to ensure that these people who have paid money into the fund will be treated with respect and dignity and that their claims will be expedited as quickly as possible. This is what the act is all about.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, to the extent that the regulation read to us by the Minister of Labour clarifies the situation, we welcome it. I suspect that it does clarify the situation, at least with respect to teachers in most of the provinces of Canada. I believe there is one province, though, the province of New Brunswick, where there was a different situation before the act was passed. We understood this when we were dealing with the bill in committee. But I repeat that insofar as this regulation would seem to clarify the situation with respect to teachers in the other nine provinces, we welcome it.

Nevertheless, a point has to be made—I assure Your Honour that it is closely related—with respect to the provision in the act which says that in the case of employees of provincial governments they are either all in or all out. I think this was a mistake. We opposed that provision when we were dealing with this legislation. I draw the attention of the minister to the fact that the regulation he has now