

*Unemployment Insurance*

a contribution to that fund. We believe that the fund itself is an insurance factor, that it must be run as an insurance fund, and that it should be for the use of that 1 per cent to 3 per cent of the Canadian people who, through no fault of their own, through normal unemployment can expect to be unemployed. This is the reason why the fund was established. It was not established for the maintenance of the Canadian economy in conditions of recession or unemployment.

By many of those who have spoken statements have been made to the effect that over the years the unemployment insurance fund in this country and those in other countries have been established to carry people over periods of unemployment and that they have been a vital necessity in alleviating the suffering and the other ills that affect those who find themselves unemployed through no fault of their own. This is our understanding of what the unemployment insurance fund is.

If anyone wants to know what is the difference between the three political parties with regard to the unemployment insurance fund, all he needs to do is to examine the record of the proceedings of the industrial relations committee of two years ago when the last amendments were made to the act. If he does so, he will easily be able to ascertain what is the attitude of each of the parties toward unemployment insurance.

The Conservative government has made to the act many amendments that have been advantageous. It is quite true that they brought in extensions to the period of benefits, increasing it from 32 weeks to 52 weeks. This action has been appreciated. It is also true that they extended the seasonal benefits, an action that has also been appreciated. However, in speaking of seasonal benefits, it should also be noted that these are still tied to contributions. Although you can extend them as far as you wish at either end, the contribution period is limited and will cover only a specific period of time in any event. Hence to extend it may mean that a person gets the benefits earlier but it does not necessarily mean that he gets any more unless his regular benefits have disappeared at a particular period during the seasonal benefit period.

It is also true that more people were added when the last amendments were made to the Unemployment Insurance Act. But these categories were high rate employees. They were people in the higher wage brackets. They were not such people as those who are coming into the employment market at the present time. They were not those who were in the casual labour class; they were not those that are immediately affected by seasonal unemployment. Rather they were the category of

people who seldom, if ever, are unemployed; and if they are unemployed, they have skills that will enable them to take employment in fields other than the one in which they are highly skilled. They still have a good advantage in obtaining employment, if any employment at all is available. So these people did contribute and were not going to be entitled to any additional benefits.

We say the amendment should be amended by adding the following words:

—and its failure to give consideration to the reimbursement of the fund from the public treasury for the excessive depletion it has suffered as a consequence of the recent abnormal unemployment.

Because of seasonal employment conditions in Canada we believe that 1 per cent to 3 per cent unemployment may be expected. It certainly is not welcomed; it is not wanted; but we anticipate that from time to time there will be a slight seasonal unemployment situation in the region of 1 per cent to 3 per cent. Anything over this will be caused, or is likely to be caused by other reasons which do not come under the conditions for which the fund was set up.

We have suggested that anything over this figure must be compensated by the federal treasury because the federal government is responsible for the employment situation. I have not heard the minister say he is not responsible for the employment situation. We believe that in those fields where unemployment is greater than the minimum amount, the federal government must make contributions to maintain the unemployment insurance fund.

At the present time this is not being done. If another season passes and this situation prevails, we will either have to find new ways of adding money through contributions or the fund will no longer have any money in it.

Yesterday the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mr. Browne) made quite a long speech. I see him today sitting in a position that would indicate he may be the assistant to the assistant to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr). If so, I wonder whether what he said is a reflection of this government's attitude.

The hon. member pointed out in his speech:

—we have seen once more a demonstration of the complete irresponsibility of the opposition in this house...and of their absolute failure to do anything—in fact their determination to do absolutely nothing—to assist in the solving of any problems that might be facing this country.

Our suggestion that we take from the treasury that amount of money which will be calculated on the excess of unemployment over what could be considered to be the original interpretation of the amount of