

Unemployment Insurance Act

If any further proof were needed as to the justification for our claim, I am sure it could be found in the further figures or calculations which could be made to a more exact figure in connection with the sums received and the sums expended.

The minister has said that there will be further amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act. These were indicated in the speech from the throne. He has said that the bill will be introduced shortly, and will be discussed in the house at an early date. As a matter of fact the newspapers are already making what might be termed informed guesses as to the contents of that measure. But I should like to remark that if the House of Commons had been called to meet last autumn, as the leader of this party asked, amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act could have been incorporated in one bill, brought down at one time and considered carefully weeks in advance of the time when the supplementary benefits would become effective. In this way the house would have had a better picture of the over-all effect of any amendments to the act. As it is, even the minister admits that if and when further amendments to the act come down we may wish to change the bill which will be placed before the house in the course of a couple of days. It seems to me that this is ample evidence that the Hon. George Drew was right in the first place when he indicated that there were certain things which should have been discussed in the autumn of last year, rather than waiting to throw them into debate in the first days of a session after the beginning of the year—and then on the ground that they are of such urgency that they must be dealt with immediately.

Certainly, they are urgent; certainly, they should be dealt with immediately. They should have been dealt with last October or November. Certain it is that welcome though increases may be, Mr. Chairman, they do not solve the distress among the unemployed persons of this nation.

I was interested in the remarks of the Prime Minister yesterday when he admitted there is some unemployment in Canada. He said, at page 33 of *Hansard*:

There is some unemployment in Canada. There has been some unemployment in Canada every year. At the opening of every session of the Canadian parliament for the last three or four years there has been considerable anxiety over the kind and extent of unemployment in Canada.

That is true, Mr. Chairman, because unemployment has been increasing every year for the last four or five years. The Prime Minister then goes on to say:

That situation has eased as the season advanced, and there is reason to expect that it will do so again.

I might remark, Mr. Chairman, that there is reason also to expect that we shall have serious unemployment again this year before the season advances far enough to ease the situation. I hope that in presenting his bill the minister will have more to offer to this house than the bland assurance that if we can sit the thing out everybody will eventually get a job.

I noticed in the last report, which has come jointly from the Department of Labour and the dominion bureau of statistics, that the increase in unemployment as at November 18 last, the period for which figures are available, was, in the province of Ontario, 23 per cent over the year before. In the city of Hamilton, my own city, which is an industrial centre, it was 26 per cent higher. It is true that if you take the nation as a whole the increase in unemployment over the year before was 11 per cent. If my memory serves me well we got dangerously close to the 600,000 mark last year. Therefore, even if it is 11 per cent more, taking the average over the nation as a whole, it is an extremely serious situation. I am sure that despite supplementary benefits or any other stopgap that may be brought in by the government, it must look like a long bleak winter to those without jobs, and this little sop of 25 per cent increase, while welcomed, will not supply what the workers want most, namely, jobs; nor will it solve the problem of those who are unemployed and do not receive benefits, those who have been in uninsurable employment, those who have insufficient contributions, those who have taken ill and were forced to leave jobs on that account, and other classifications. I might say, last and by no means least, it will not solve the problem of the municipalities who have for far too long now borne the weight of welfare costs for those who are classed as employables.

I speak for my colleagues in this house when I say we welcome any legislation which is going to ease this situation, no matter how slightly. We shall be interested to see this bill when it is available for distribution and we hope that it will have some effect in alleviation of distress of our workers. We still say the government has not gone nearly far enough in trying to supply what the workers want most, namely, not unemployment relief but jobs.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Chairman, there is not much one can say in regard to this bill, as it is not before us. We do not know just what is involved in it, but from the information we have we must welcome the measure. But, as the last speaker said, it will fail even to relieve, to any considerable extent, the situation with which we are now confronted.