

Supply—Labour

report, undertaking the fundamental changes that must be made if we are to overcome the difficulties that we are facing in this particular situation. It is a fact that the condition of the fund reflects the improved employment situation. I have never said that the problem of unemployment in Canada was solved. I have stated that the employment situation has improved. The payments from the fund and the number of claimants on the fund have both decreased quite considerably and have improved the financial condition of the fund. The improved employment situation is not only reflected in the condition of the fund but also in the employment statistics released by the dominion bureau of statistics. There has been no effort, Mr. Chairman, certainly not on the part of the Minister of Labour nor to my knowledge on the part of the commission, to decrease the financial obligations on the fund by a stepped up effort to disqualify any applicants. No directive has been sent out by the government to the commission on this point; certainly no change has been made and no instructions have been issued to the commission.

I believe all hon. members have expressed understandable concern about individual persons who have been disqualified. I have attempted to examine each of these cases, but I would remind hon. gentlemen that the commission is responsible for the administration of the insurance act. There is a procedure, beginning with a board of referees and going up to an umpire, by which these claims can be adjudicated. It is not possible for the Minister of Labour to adjudicate personally any of these claims or the possible findings of the commission or the ultimate decision of the umpire. I would be glad on the basis of the views that have been expressed tonight to discuss the matter with the commissioners with a view to at least making the situation more understandable to the individuals who, because of regulations, are disqualified.

The hon. member for Cape Breton South has referred to a difficult situation that has arisen in Cape Breton. It is a very complicated situation involving several unions; one on strike, one refusing to cross a picket line and another with its members denied work because of the actions of the other two unions. The commission is investigating this situation to determine the eligibility for benefits of each of these groups, who are eligible and who are not.

Mr. MacInnis: I hope the minister is not including in his reference to investigation of the qualifications of these different groups, the large number of mine workers. Has the commission not already ruled on the eligibility of a claimant, namely that he is not required

to take employment at a strikebound plant? Does this ruling not qualify the railway men as persons who are entitled to unemployment benefits?

While I am on my feet I should like to put now to the minister a question that arose as a result of a remark he made. The minister stated flatly that the sitting tonight was at the request of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. It may be that the hon. member brought this question up at the opening of today's sitting, but is the minister not aware of the fact that the Acting Prime Minister, in accepting the proposal of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, said he had every intention of asking the house to sit tonight not from eight to ten but from seven to eleven? Is there any liaison between the Acting Prime Minister and the Minister of Labour on this very important issue?

Mr. MacEachen: I think the answer to that is quite clear. The Acting Prime Minister suggested extended sittings, and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre suggested that the extended sittings deal with this particular matter. This is my understanding.

I do not want to adjudicate on the qualifications of workers for benefits in Cape Breton, but it is clear to me that the mine workers will be eligible, those directly involved in the work stoppage will not be eligible for benefits, and the other category is being investigated.

Mr. Howard: I should like to pose a question to the minister and my question is related to the foresight of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre today in suggesting that this particular item be dealt with this evening. None of us, I expect, can forecast with any certainty that these supplementaries will be passed by any particular date. On the basis of that, and to guarantee that there will be sufficient money in the unemployment insurance fund to pay the claimants, would the minister, in consultation with his colleagues, be prepared to introduce a special appropriation bill covering the particular item before us so that we can guarantee that the appropriation bill will be passed and the money available, even though we might not deal with the other estimates?

Mr. MacEachen: I can assure my hon. friend that whatever procedure is necessary to ensure the payment of benefits, that will be followed by the government.

Mr. Bell: Mr. Chairman, would the minister like to take this opportunity to answer the charges made on national television on Sunday in respect of the situation at Bell Island? The national employment office was accused