

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

that he could not give details but he hoped that within a reasonable period of time it would be possible to implement some of these recommendations by order in council or by regulations under the act. In a supplementary question I asked the minister whether it was not true that benefits could be raised only by amending the act, and not by regulation, to which the minister replied that that was a question of law which he was not in a position to answer. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I post-posed this question for an adjournment debate.

I should like to say just a few brief words on the two points I raised on January 20. First it seems to me that the case for an increase in the maximum benefit rates under the Unemployment Insurance Act is so clear that it need only be stated. The present maximum rate is \$36 a week in the case of an unemployed person with a dependant and \$27 a week in the case of a single unemployed person. Those rates were set in 1959, eight years ago. If one applies to those rates any index he likes, whether the cost of living index, the wage index, the gross national product, or what have you, he will come up with a figure for today which ought to be considerably higher. In fact it gets into the \$50 bracket for an unemployed person with a dependant.

Not only is it a fact that there have been no changes in the maximum rates during the eight years since 1959, but also five years have gone by since the Gill committee made its report. In 1962 that committee recommended that the rates I already have quoted—\$27 and \$36—should be increased to \$36 and \$48. I should like to point out that if you start, as of 1962, with these rates of \$36 for an unattached unemployed person and \$48 for an unemployed person with a dependant and apply to them the increases in the wage rates or in the cost of living which have taken place since then, you come up with figures which are even higher than those I suggested a moment ago.

In addition to these changes which have taken place in the last eight years, there is the fact that the government at last brought before parliament a labour code which includes a minimum wage rate of \$1.25 an hour. That same piece of legislation speaks of a 40-hour week. This would seem to suggest that in the government's mind \$50 a week is a minimum upon which working persons should be expected to live. These days the government even speaks about a guaranteed annual income. I am not sure that it understands what that phrase means, but at least members of the government like to talk about it. I

[Mr. Knowles.]

suggest this is an area where this idea might be applied. In other words, it seems to me quite clear that we are being unfair to persons who are unemployed, to persons who have contributed to unemployment insurance over the years, by leaving them with maximum rates of \$27 or \$36 per week, in view of the fact that these rates were set eight years ago.

The other point referred to during our question and answer exchange on Friday, January 20, was as to whether this change could be made by regulation. The minister said this was a question of law and that he was not in a position to answer it. While I recognize that he is a lawyer and that I am not, it seems to me it does not take much legal training to read the Unemployment Insurance Act and find that the maximum rates are set by the act, and that there is no provision in the act for those maximum rates to be increased by regulation or by order in council. Surely it is crystal clear that the only way maximum rates can be changed is by an amendment brought before parliament itself.

I should like to protest most strongly over the way in which the years are being allowed to slip by without any amendment being made to the Unemployment Insurance Act. There are other improvements that need to be made as well, but to let these years slip by with nothing being done to increase these maximum benefit rates is quite uncalled for, and it is most unfair to those people who have paid into this fund and have a right to expect the protection the Unemployment Insurance Act was designed to provide.

It is my hope, therefore, that the government will not continue to delay action on this matter on the grounds that it is not clear whether the act needs to be amended. I hope an amendment will be brought in soon, and that it will increase these rates to something of the order of \$50 or more per week.

Mr. J. A. Byrne (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, there is very little that can be added to what the minister said on January 20 in reply to the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, except perhaps that a study is being made of the recommendations of the committee which was set up to study this matter.

The minister has been otherwise engaged and regrets that he has been unable to give this matter the thorough study it deserves. It is encouraging to note that unemployment insurance and unemployment itself is not the burning question it was at the time the Gill