

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

by their own action the government have made a farce out of the insurance principle that underlies the Unemployment Insurance Act. During the term of office of the previous government, and the past five years that this government has been in office, no attempt whatever has been made to correct this particular evil. However, I will have more to say about that later.

I also wonder why some efforts have not been made to cure some of the evils that have crept into the picture, not in the form of legislation but more as a result of policy, regulations and so forth. The most evident of these is a matter that has been touched on by one or two other hon. members. I am referring to the policy making and decision making functions that have been taken away from people in the field, the people who know the local situation, local conditions and local problems. I should like to ask the minister why this has occurred; what was the reason or purpose for it. Was this purely an economy measure, or did the government believe that these people were not properly qualified to make decisions?

I have my suspicions about this step that has been taken. Most of the complaints that have come to my attention in this regard were made at a certain time. I suspect that the purpose was to enable the Minister of Finance (Mr. Sharp) to use the unemployment insurance fund as an instrument of fiscal policy.

• (4:20 p.m.)

I notice that when the minister declared that there would be a clamp-down and that spending would be cut back, by a strange coincidence the number of complaints that were received with regard to unemployment insurance suddenly mushroomed. Shortly after that, the authority for making decisions about unemployment insurance was taken away from the Timmins office. Decisions were to be made in Toronto, which is about 500 miles away.

Most complaints which have come to my attention have come about as the result of a very carefully worded form. When a man loses his job and has to apply for unemployment insurance, he must fill out this carefully worded form, which seems to contain some carefully laid traps for the man who is filling it out. No doubt officials, in common with members of chambers of commerce and various hon. members of the house, maintain that in this country we have a great horde of people who are professionals at getting

moneys they have no right to from the unemployment insurance commission.

I suppose a few in this country spend all their time in seeing what they can get out of the unemployment insurance fund. But these forms present no problem to such people. They know everything in it by heart. They know how many stamps they need in their books and how to fill out the form so as to avoid delays or problems. The men who fall victim to these forms are those who have never drawn unemployment insurance. They are men who have worked for 20, 25 or 30 years and, when the mine closes down, when the job folds up or when the business goes under, are forced to apply for assistance. They fill the form out and, not knowing what to avoid, often disqualify themselves on pure technicalities. The form must then go to Toronto, 500 miles away, for a decision. When the decision comes back the men may want to appeal it, and as a result they must go to Toronto. The legislation does provide these men with the right of appealing such a decision; they have to appear before the referee. But if a man is unemployed and looking for unemployment insurance, how can he afford to go to Toronto, 500 miles away, to appeal? If the appeal machinery were in the local area that would be fine, but it is not much good having it 500 miles away. The men are precluded from appealing because of the distance involved.

I just wonder, Mr. Speaker, if the objective behind all this is to enable the government and the Unemployment Insurance Commission to chisel from the workingmen of this country, who are entitled to certain benefits. I wonder if this has all been worked out deliberately with that end in view.

I have also run into the problem of language difficulty in this field. I represent an area in which half the population is French Canadian. Many French speaking Canadians work in the lumbering industry and mining industry. These are the men who are most often affected by unemployment insurance regulations. When a mine shuts down or a wood cut is finished and they become unemployed, they fill out this form I spoke of. To them it is in a foreign language. As a result they are more vulnerable to making errors which can disqualify them. If they make a mistake, away goes the form for a decision in Toronto, and back comes another form with a great big letter that they cannot read or understand, and they must go to a lawyer, a