

Unemployment Insurance Act

act and to the administration of certain parts of it.

I commend the minister for extending eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits to those whose total yearly earnings do not exceed \$7,800. When I was first elected to office the majority of the complaints I received about unemployment insurance came from people who had been elevated to what could be called semi-supervisory positions and as a result unemployment insurance premiums were not deducted from their wages because then they were salaried people whose incomes were about the \$5,460 mark. These men still wished to be covered by unemployment insurance because in a sense their new positions were only temporary. Any lay-off would mean that they would be sent back to their former positions, and if they lost their employment altogether they would lose a considerable portion of their benefits. I certainly commend the minister for increasing eligibility to the \$7,800 mark because I think this is a very good move.

● (4:10 p.m.)

My colleague the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) raised a point with which I agree concerning the separation of the national employment service from the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act. Recently in respect of an appeal I asked whether there was any indication that the applicant had refused to take any kind of job which had been offered to him in the field with which he was familiar. I was informed that the officials were not concerned about this but were only involved with the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act. I believe there should be a closer tie-in between the employment service and the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

I would be the first to agree that there are abuses of the unemployment insurance fund. We all know this. In any program of this nature there are bound to be abuses. However, because of these abuses I feel that many people who are legitimately entitled to receive benefits from the unemployment insurance fund find it difficult to qualify for benefits. My colleague the hon. member for Skeena referred to section 54 with regard to the matter of disqualification. He cited some of the experiences he has had in this connection.

I should like to direct the minister's attention to one case in which I was involved recently. I should not like to suggest that this

[Mr. Fawcett.]

person was deliberately led into the position of being disqualified but I believe that certain questions directed to her may have been responsible for her disqualification. Perhaps I might give an outline of the case. It had to do with a lady who had been employed in a fairly heavily populated area where it was not too difficult to obtain employment. She had been working for a considerable period of time and had been contributing to the unemployment insurance fund. When her employment ceased she was unable to obtain any other employment in that area. I presume the main reason was that it was the fall of the year when there was not too much work available in the line she was following.

When this lady went to register for unemployment insurance she was notified that she was disqualified because she had restricted herself so far as employment was concerned. The only way in which she had restricted herself was that she had stated it was impossible for her to get to Sudbury some 20 miles distant for seven o'clock in the morning because there was no bus service which would get her there for that hour. I believe this is a ridiculous situation. She lived in an area where work had previously been provided for her. Why should she be disqualified simply because there did not happen to be a suitable transportation service which would get her to Sudbury for seven o'clock in the morning?

I believe there is a need for better public relations between those who administer the Unemployment Insurance Act and the people who contribute to the unemployment insurance fund. There seems to be a belief on the part of some of the administrators that they are doling out some kind of charitable fund rather than administering an insurance fund into which these people have been paying. I do not suggest that all the administrators are guilty of this but I am quite sure some of them do take that attitude. As a result some people actually do not apply for unemployment insurance when they are legitimately entitled to it because they feel they may be degrading themselves by asking for charity rather than for something which under the law is rightfully theirs.

I believe that more information in respect of unemployment insurance should be available to the people. I fully realize that some information is available. It is true that many people do not try to acquaint themselves with their rights under the act. By the same token, however, too many administrators do not