

Inquiries of the Ministry

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member knows very well he cannot suggest that another member is deliberately deceiving him or deceiving the House, or deliberately deceiving any person. I am sure that the hon. member, who has had numerous exchanges with the Minister of Labour in this regard, would not want to impute that there is an attempt on the part of the minister, or of any member of this House, to deceive him deliberately in this or any other regard.

Mr. MacInnis: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I stand here in this House and confirm that the truth is stronger than our rules. To support this question of privilege I quote from the minister's own handwriting which reads:

If you ask me if Devco will absorb increase of 10 per cent of UIC benefits effective January 1/70—

He should have said January 3, 1971.

—I will answer that I intend to make certain that this extra monies go to the people it was intended for—the people and not the company.

The miners, and not the company. I am sick and tired of having the minister in charge of UIC benefits trying to pass on questions within his jurisdiction to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion, who has no business at all dealing with the UIC. I repeat that the minister has deliberately deceived me on this.

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member is not permitted to say that.

Mr. MacInnis: I have said it.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member has some obligation, as do all other members of this House, to respect the rules and the practices of the House. Even if a member feels very strongly about a matter, even if he feels he should go as far as he can to promote a cause, he has no right to violate the rules of the House which command hon. members not to accuse another member of the House of deliberately deceiving him. Perhaps the minister might like to reply.

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, I have listened with a great deal of interest to the letter which was described as in my own handwriting, and I stand by that letter. I do think that the unemployment insurance increase of 10 per cent should go to the miners and not to Devco. I challenge the hon. member to put a question to the appropriate minister—he may be surprised by the answer—if he is not just interested in making political propaganda out of this matter.

Mr. Speaker: Order. At the same time the minister is deserving of a suggestion from the Chair. He has no right to suggest that another member is asking a question or is making a statement with motives. I also suggest that the minister and the hon. member should have a conference about this matter. I realize that they have been discussing it together from time to time, but there should be some way in which the matter can be resolved.

Some months ago, by unanimous consent, the House agreed to send this very serious matter to a committee of

[Mr. MacInnis.]

the House, and I was hoping that the very difficult situation might be resolved before now. However, that still does not make it possible for the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond to say that another member has deceived him deliberately, and that it does not make it possible for the minister to impute motives to another member. I hope both hon. members will find it possible to indicate that they did not intend to make such statements.

Mr. MacInnis: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I would respectfully ask for a ruling on whether any minister can shift the responsibility for answering questions on matters which come under his jurisdiction to another minister? In other words, are we now permitted to ask any minister in the House questions on any subject, or should questions be restricted to the jurisdiction of a minister?

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member cannot ask for a ruling in general or in theory. The hon. member knows, as do all hon. members, that a ruling was made a long time ago that questions can be answered only by ministers who have responsibility for specific fields of administrative duty. I have made that ruling myself on a number of occasions. I make it again today.

Sometimes it is very difficult for the Chair to determine which minister has a particular responsibility, but I think the Chair is entitled to accept the word of a member of the cabinet that a certain question does not fall under his jurisdiction. If a minister makes that kind of statement, I think the Chair is authorized to assume that it does not come under his jurisdiction. This is the ruling which I am making, and which has been made previously by the Chair on a number of occasions.

Mr. Norman A. Cafik (Ontario): Supplementary—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am not sure whether the hon. member's contribution is supplementary to the point of order, the question of privilege, or the question raised originally by the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond.

Mr. Cafik: Mr. Speaker, I am rising on a question supplementary to the one asked by the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond, and I would like to direct it to the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion. Will the minister assure the House that the full benefits of the unemployment insurance increase will, in fact, be made available to the Devco workers?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Marchand (Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Mr. Speaker, there has been a meeting of the Board of Directors of Devco these last few days, and it has been decided to grant full benefits to retired workers. There was never a question of deducting from workers' pay cheques any amount whatever from unemployment insurance. There has merely been a question of deducting from the contribution to the pension fund by Devco the supplementary amount paid by the Unemployment Insur-