

*Unemployment Insurance*

**Mr. Angus MacInnis (Vancouver East):** Mr. Speaker, the Acting Minister of Labour (Mr. Martin) preceded his statement in connection with these proposed amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act with a short review of the provisions and purposes of the act itself. It was my privilege to have a part in the adoption of that measure when it was introduced here in 1940. Not only did I support it in the house; I also supported it outside the house, among many working class organizations where it was perhaps not properly understood. Because of that I must say that I regret very much to have to rise today and express myself as being extremely disappointed with the measure the government is presenting to this house at a time of emergency, a time of serious unemployment, and with what the government is proposing to meet that situation. It should not be lost on this house that the unemployment condition throughout this country is so serious that, when the government brought down this measure and asked that we postpone discussion on the address in order to allow the measure to go through, we readily agreed to do so. But let me tell the house that the measure now before us does not begin to meet the needs of the present unemployment situation. Whatever it does—and I am accepting it and will support it as a forward step—it will not prevent unemployment. It will not meet the need of those who are now unemployed; in my opinion, it will not meet the need of even the majority of those who are now unemployed. When the government asks the members of this house to clear the way for legislation of this kind, surely they should have something better to present than what is now before us.

A report in the newspaper the other day on the unemployment situation gave the number of unemployed as 375,600. In two sections of the country the percentage of the labour force unemployed had reached what is considered to be the danger point; that is, where even the present Unemployment Insurance Act, over an extended period of time, would not be able to cope with it. In the maritime provinces the percentage of the labour force unemployed is 10.2 and in British Columbia it is 15.8. I should just like to tell the minister that the people in my province are disturbed about the unemployment situation. Along with other members of parliament from the greater Vancouver area, I met with labour organizations, veterans' organizations, and attended several meetings called by the Vancouver city council. They are all disturbed about this situation, and I am quite satisfied

[Mr. Graydon.]

that they will still be disturbed about the situation after they have seen the provisions for meeting it in this measure.

Let me briefly go over what is proposed to be done. It is proposed to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1940, to provide for supplementary benefits during the winter months; and I understand that the winter months as defined by these amendments are from January 1 to March 31. Ordinarily, in my part of the country, those are the winter months. But that is not so in other parts of Canada and it was not the case in my province this winter. In British Columbia there was a tremendous amount of unemployment in November and December and, as I shall show the minister and the house shortly, there was a large amount of unemployment across the dominion in October of last year. It is also proposed to provide for additional insurance coverage. That is all to the good and I shall have more to say about that point later. Those are the two points in the resolution that will in any way help the unemployed; and when I say that, I am not leaving out of consideration the explanations made by the minister.

There is provision for some other matters such as simplification of rates of contribution, increase in the membership of the advisory committee from six to eight, and that members of the national employment committee shall receive the same remuneration as the members of the advisory committee. All that, however, is of no particular importance to those who are now unemployed.

This measure stems from the government's fallacious belief that the present large scale unemployment is seasonal or temporary, owing to weather conditions and circumstances of that kind. Unfortunately, in my opinion, that is not so. Unemployment is as natural to the capitalist system as is profit. As a matter of fact, the strongest supporters of the capitalist system insist that a certain amount of unemployment is essential to the proper functioning of the system and that it is bad only when it goes beyond a certain point.

The government should have taken the trouble to inform itself of the ups and downs in employment in this country during the last thirty years. If the government had informed itself and was prepared to act in accordance with what it found, it would not present such a measure as this to deal with an unemployment condition of the magnitude that now confronts us. Let me direct attention to an item in the seventh report of the unemployment insurance commission for the fiscal year 1947-48, at page 27:

Statistics for the past thirty years show that in fifteen of them unemployment in certain months has