

Mr. Mackasey: Mr. Speaker, I have tried to participate today on a certain level, and I shall try to stay there, but if hon. members opposite want to heckle I am quite prepared to get into a good debate. I enjoy a battle but if Your Honour should prefer that I desist, that is fine, too.

There are points that I should like to make. The hon. member from Alberta whose riding changes periodically—I shall describe him as a very wealthy lawyer from Alberta—he is a good friend of mine but he keeps shifting his role—

An hon. Member: And what happened to you?

Mr. Mackasey: The hon. member to whom I refer posed a very intelligent question, that is the question of abuse. The mail which I have been receiving, Mr. Speaker, which is pretty heavy, has shifted in tone somewhat in recent weeks. The mood now seems to be that we need unemployment insurance, that there is nothing to be gained by destroying what has been part of the social fabric of this country for 30 years.

An hon. Member: To get them back to where?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I had occasion a moment ago when an hon. member was trying to ask a question to say that other hon. members were making it difficult for him to do so. I think I have to say the same thing to protect the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey). It is entirely against the rules of this House and the long established practice for hon. members to heckle and make it difficult for another member to make his speech. It is extremely easy for hon. members to interrupt the member who is speaking, but it is against the Standing Orders of this House. I suggest to hon. members that they should be fair to the hon. member for Verdun and allow him to make his speech.

Mr. Mackasey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. If I did not know better I would think the people who are heckling—who are in a minority in the opposition—are those so desperate to get into power that they want to ride on the backs of the poor. I am not going to fall into that trap, however; their speeches are on record and their efforts during the election campaign to destroy what is very progressive legislation is there for all to see. I can understand their dilemma in having to vote for or against the bill, thus showing their inconsistency with the approach they took during the election. I can resort to this kind of attack if they prefer or can continue along the lines I had decided. We are on third reading, not second reading, now and it is entirely up to the opposition to determine on what plane they want to continue the debate.

I received a lot of mail on this subject which all members of this House are welcome to read. In recent weeks the theme of the mail has shifted. No longer is it coming from unemployed people who are saying "What am I guilty of?" or "Find me a job".

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Mackasey: It is coming from people who are saying "We are amongst those fortunate people who can afford 90 cents or a dollar for someone less fortunate, but we want to be sure there are no abuses in the act". I think

Unemployment Insurance Act

that is the point that the hon. gentleman wanted to make in all honesty and sincerity. The question of abuse is one that has bothered us all. Last night there were few people present and I did not have the opportunity of reviewing once and for all the argument regarding abuse. I think hon. members opposite are concerned. I know there are Liberals in the Conservative party just as there are Conservatives in the Liberal party.

• (1520)

Mr. Woolliams: The hon. member is not talking about the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) is he?

Mr. Mackasey: I should like to make the following statistics clear, because they concern abuse. I want hon. members to think of 1970, the last complete year when we operated under the old act. Older members will know exactly what that implies. Under the old act the greatest pay-out was \$53, I think, although on average the pay-out was \$35. The maximum was raised to \$58. In order to qualify one had to acquire 30 weeks attachment to a job over a two-year period, and eight weeks had to be acquired in the last 52 weeks. As there was no universality provision under the old act, only part of the work force was covered. School teachers were not covered, and it might be interesting to note that over 15,000 of them are unemployed in Canada today. Nurses were not covered. Certain public servants were eliminated. Casual workers were eliminated. Hospital workers were not included. People with salaries of over \$7,800 were not included. So, the work force which was covered in 1970 totalled about 4,900,000. That meant that if those people became unemployed they were eligible for unemployment insurance benefits. This number also included so-called self-employed people, such as fishermen and other people in special categories.

One would think that with such a small work force, with difficulties regarding eligibility the provisions for which were very stringent, and with the lower rates of unemployment in 1970-72, there would have been a substantially smaller number of people on claim. Mr. Speaker, in 1970, of 4,900,000 people who were eligible for unemployment insurance and covered, at various times of the year 2,049,000 people were on claim. I now come to 1972. I shall skip 1971, for a very good reason which I can explain. In the first part of the year we operated under the old act, and in the second part under the new act. Universality did not apply, but at least I can give hon. members the following statistic: there were 2,092,000 on claim.

In 1972, the year we have just completed and, significantly, the first year in which universality applied and the first year when the overwhelming majority of Canadian workers were covered by unemployment insurance, the number of people eligible for unemployment insurance and entitled to collect if unemployed rose to 7,150,000. Even more significant is the change in the eligibility rule, which was reduced from 30 weeks over a two-year period to eight weeks in one year. According to what I learned from the astute questioning of opposition members in the Miscellaneous Estimates Committee and Labour Committee—and after all it is their job to ask these questions and that is why these committees are set up—2,099,000 people were on claim, only 50,000 more than in 1970. This hap-