

The honourable leader is perfectly correct in stating that, including workers and dependents, about seven million persons were given some sort of protection under this Act. The first benefits were paid in 1942, and since that time the benefits paid out have amounted to more than \$200 million. That seems to me to be a large sum, considering that from 1940 up to the present time we have had what many people regard as almost full employment.

My honourable colleagues on this side of the chamber are somewhat concerned over the fact that at present we have a great deal of unemployment in our fair country. The registered number of unemployed at the moment is 375,000, but many are not registered. I know that in the part of Saskatchewan from which I come a large number of people who might be entitled to benefits under this Act have never taken the trouble to register. I am of the opinion that instead of 375,000, the number of unemployed just now is at least 400,000.

We are also of the opinion that much of this unemployment is not seasonal. During the great depression of the 30's the number of unemployed in Canada was only about twice 400,000, and surely, if there are 400,000 out of work in this period of practically full employment, it cannot be said that the inability of all of them to find work is attributable to seasonal conditions.

Hon. Mr. Wood: We have three million more people now.

Hon. Mr. Aseltine: We have more people, it is true, but still 400,000 would seem to be a very large number of unemployed for this period. It is too bad that we have now to consider a feeble substitute for work, instead of legislation creating work. Surely an attempt to find work for our people is the major job of the Canadian parliament. I do not think we should wait until matters get worse. The government should heed the warnings—and I think they are heeding them at present—but we on this side would like to know what are the government's plans for the future.

After these few introductory remarks I should like to discuss the principle of the present measure. Aside from what may be said as to some features of the bill, I do not think that any of us have any serious objection to the principle. The measure was forecast in the Speech from the Throne, in these words:

However, seasonal and local factors have given rise to a significant amount of temporary regional unemployment during the past few months and the security provisions established under unemployment insurance legislation have been called upon to meet the first important test since they were brought into effect.

Although a high proportion of persons temporarily unemployed are actually in receipt of unemployment insurance benefits, you will be asked to give consideration to a bill to widen the scope and extend the benefits of unemployment insurance.

Honourable members on this side of the house desire to facilitate the passage of this bill, for it has quite a number of features which we think will be helpful; but it goes much farther than the Speech from the Throne led us to believe it would. For example, in seven or eight respects it amounts to practically complete overhauling of the unemployment insurance law:

1. The rates of contribution are changed and raised, and contributions between employer and employee are equalized. Honourable members who read the bill will find that 6 cents a week is added to the present contribution of both the employer and employee.

2. Statutory conditions are enlarged by increasing the periods of contribution.

3. Outside permissible earnings are increased from \$1.50 a day to \$2. This has already been pointed out by the honourable leader (Hon. Mr. Robertson).

4. The rates of benefit have been changed.

5. Additional penalties and powers of inspection have been added.

6. There is a change with respect to the waiting days.

7. The advisory committee has been increased from six to eight members. Besides these there are many other changes, about which honourable senators may wish to ask questions in committee tomorrow. It seems to me that employers and employees should have been called in and consulted by the government before so many changes were made in the Act, and then we would have had their advice and opinions as to what was best to be done.

I have previously stated that the bill is very complicated and that many points need clarification. In addition to what I have already mentioned, there are several new features. The Act has been made applicable to a new group, persons with a salary of over \$3,120 and up to \$4,800. This group will number some 90,000 people, and at \$1.08 a week their contribution will mean an additional \$5 million per year in payments to the fund. The majority of these people will never be unemployed, but still they are compelled to make this contribution.

Hon. Mr. Horner: A special tax.

Hon. Mr. Aseltine: This is a special tax imposed upon them by the measure. If this bill becomes law \$34,320,000 will be collected between July 1, 1950 and March 31, 1952.