

Unemployment Insurance Act

What will happen if you make a "special" or "advance" payment? The card of the recipient will be pulled out and if he ever becomes unemployed again, there will be a problem because it takes at least two months to get the card back into the machine.

That is the information I was given by regional chairmen, and those in charge at the Montreal office, Mr. Speaker; and no one has ever contradicted them. I deplore, the fact that the minister misled the House and continues to do so. Before we pass this bill I would very much like the minister to give us a formal guarantee that the benefits will be paid to those who are entitled to them, that the Unemployment Insurance Commission will become personalized, that the offices will be decentralized. For instance, Montreal serves the entire province of Quebec. Steps must be taken so that the unemployed in Victoriaville, Arthabaska or anywhere else in the province will receive their benefits.

Mr. Speaker, those were the few remarks I wanted to make. I made them sincerely, frankly. I want to say this to the minister: time has come for him to pull his hands out of his pockets, to assume his ministerial responsibilities and to see to it that the Unemployment Insurance Commission reaches in fact the people it claims it wants to serve.

Until the contrary is proved, I shall say that the UIC does not achieve its objectives that it is made up of both competent and incompetent people, but that one thing is sure: the overall administration of the UIC is inadequate and does not really achieve its goals.

This is why, Mr. Speaker, it will all be very nice to vote this evening or tomorrow to remove the ceiling and replenish the unemployment insurance fund. This demonstrates once more the failure of the government to stop unemployment. It will all be very nice to pass this legislation but if we vote millions of dollars to pay for benefits that will not be paid out in time, I say that this will have been a waste of time and the minister has misled us and is mocking this House.

I should also like to tell the Conservatives, while I'm in that vein, that I find their attitude concerning this bill absolutely inconceivable and irresponsible. They want to play politics on the government's back, but actually they are playing politics on the backs of the unemployed, because if they kill this bill, this will mean that the claimants will not receive their cheque because the fund will have run out.

Even if there are problems with the Unemployment Insurance Commission, let them rise, as I am rising, let them put pressure on the minister to make him stand up to his responsibilities, which he has not done to this day, in order at least that the benefits meet their purpose. Then we may think about changing the government, but let us not play politics on the backs of unemployed people who are utterly destitute.

I ask the Conservatives to show more decency than the Liberals do. Last year, the Liberals, seeing that the benefits were not being paid out, had the nerve to make an agreement with the government of the province of Quebec in order for the claimants to be granted loans by the

[Mr. Fortin.]

welfare administration until the unemployment insurance cheques were sent out.

Mr. Speaker, this situation is absolutely revolting. The minister did not bother with solving the problem of paying unemployment insurance benefits. He was more interested in reaching an agreement with Quebec whereby the unemployed would depend on welfare allowances that had to be repaid.

Mr. Speaker, I say that this is grossly indecent on the part of the Liberals and I cannot see how the Progressive Conservative members can protect this system by killing the bill and making once again the unemployed foot the bill.

Mr. Speaker, I urge both old parties not only to pay the unemployed what is due to them but also to change either the act or the minister.

• (2100)

[English]

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on third reading of the bill. I would have much preferred to have spoken on the amendment which has been ruled out of order as I think the significant part of this bill is the amendment to do away with the \$800 million statutory limitation placed on the fund by the government in 1971. It should be noted that it was not the opposition which set the statutory limit, but the government itself. It was obviously done because the government, through the then minister, now the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey), made a solemnly declared statement before the committee that the actuarial figures were bona fide and that the government was quite sure the \$800 million ceiling would not be exceeded as there was no way their calculations could be out that much. Even when it was suggested that the studies indicated some doubt about the figures of the Unemployment Insurance Commission officials, the suggestion was dismissed; yet it has been shown that the figures presented to the committee were in fact considerably closer to the final outcome than the government's own figures.

The hon. member for Verdun gave a list of reasons the statutory limit could be released or eased and indicated how the Unemployment Insurance Commission could be checked in a number of ways, but an example was given to show that these were not likely to be very effective.

We are only debating this bill tonight because the \$800 million ceiling was put in to look after eventualities. The President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) suggested it was put in for a good purpose. There has been some intimation that unless this bill is passed, unemployment insurance recipients will not be able to receive their money. This seems to be a red herring because we know the government can make other arrangements, if necessary, to have the unemployment insurance fund balanced.

No one wants unemployment insurance recipients to go without the money allocated to them under the plan, but it speaks poorly of the government's planning if after six months with parliament not in session, from August to the end of December, it suddenly appears necessary to put through substantial changes to unemployment insurance legislation with little or no scrutiny by the House. I sug-