

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

was taking steps to iron out the bugs which had developed initially in this operation.

I attempted not to be dogmatic about it. I think all of us are willing to have our public services administered with the least possible overhead cost, but I did express, during some discussion I had with the then Minister of Labour, very serious doubts that this system could actually function properly, certainly in the area with which I am familiar. I must say, for reasons I will not go into here, that I had a rather extended opportunity of traveling around the area of Vancouver Island earlier this year and last fall. At times I was not very far from the office of the unemployment insurance commission in the city of Nanaimo, but I had preoccupations which prevented me from going in and discussing this matter with the local management.

I must say that if there was one single subject about which I received a continuing refrain of complaints, more than any other, it was about the undue delay and awkwardness of the present system of trying to administer unemployment insurance by mail from a central office as far away from the places of residence and work of the people as is this office in Nanaimo. It may be ideal for some of the constituents of my friend the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Douglas), but there is no single office of the unemployment insurance commission in my constituency, which embraces roughly the northern three quarters of Vancouver Island.

I am not necessarily suggesting that we should go back completely to the old system of local office operation, but I am suggesting that there should be competent people to whom those desiring to make claims could go in convenient localities, and certainly in communities with a population of 20,000 or more, such as Port Alberni, or 10,000 or 12,000 such as Campbell River.

Hopefully the people are not going to have to apply for unemployment insurance all that often. I have received a continuous barrage of complaints about people being denied the benefits resulting from the premiums they have paid because the processing of them in some cases was delayed so long they were back to work before they received the benefits.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but his time has expired.

Mr. Jim McNulty (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, in reply

to the question asked concerning the intention of the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) to make a statement prior to the recess on government policy in respect of modification to the Unemployment Insurance Act, the minister does not intend to make such a statement.

The second part of the same question refers to a document received from the residents of Campbell River. This document has now been received in the office of the Minister of Labour. Apparently it is a petition from some local residents to have an office of the unemployment insurance commission opened in Campbell River. Actually the Unemployment Insurance Commission has been aware for some time that such a petition would be forthcoming. Special statistics have been maintained for some months which show the use that would be made of such an office if it were located in Campbell River.

The figures show that, based on the standards in use by the commission on a Canada-wide basis, there is no justification for a permanent office when one considers the use that would be made of such a permanent office in Campbell River. In the past six weeks there have been less than 150 claims from persons living in Campbell River. This is far short of the standard of about 12,000 claims per year that is used as the commission's criteria for establishing an office. It is, therefore, obvious that the volume of potential work from Campbell River does not warrant a full-time office.

I would like, however, to make it very clear that on the basis of a review of current claims residents of Campbell River do receive adequate service from the commission through the use of postal services. The forms they must complete in order to claim unemployment insurance benefit have been so simplified that anyone with minimum education can complete them without difficulty. The actual process of claiming benefit can then be carried out quickly and efficiently by mail with the Nanaimo office which is only a few miles away.

Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands): A few miles?

Mr. McNulty: Despite what I have said, and even though the commission believes it is providing an efficient service to the persons living in Campbell River, it is prepared to further review the situation in the area. The work associated with the unemployment insurance in this locality is somewhat seasonal; at certain times of the year, due to weather