

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

report, in February, 1966 15 new enforcement officer positions were added to the enforcement establishment, making a total of 149. It may also be advisable at this time, instead of appointing new enforcement officers, for the commission to appoint people who can help honest citizens fill out their forms properly so that they do not disqualify themselves from receiving benefits.

These are some of the matters of which I am highly critical, Mr. Speaker. I think it is now time for the minister or for somebody else, if the minister is not responsible, to bring to the attention of the commission the complaints we have been making while these amendments to the act are being discussed. Certainly it is time that somebody took the matter in hand and did something to protect the interests of many people who unfortunately are not in a position to protect themselves.

Although I am in full sympathy with the amendments to the act, there are aspects involving the present administration of unemployment insurance that very definitely require improving. I point out to the minister, and I hope he brings this to the attention of the commission, that some of the employees of the regional offices of the Unemployment Insurance Commission are not courteous to the public. I have known cases where people went to these offices and were simply given the runaround. They were unable to get a satisfactory answer to their complaints and they left the offices no wiser than when they went. This should not be allowed to happen. These employees are servants of the public. Many of them do their very best but there are some who do not, and I am highly critical of them. These are some of the matters to which I suggest the minister should give some attention and do his utmost to try to correct.

**Mr. H. W. Herridge (Kootenay West):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a few brief comments on these amendments. I am sure there are a good many working people throughout Canada who are very pleased that we are now discussing this important legislation.

We endorse the principle of this bill and are very pleased to see these amendments. However, I do want to bring to the attention of the minister that the divorce of manpower and Unemployment Insurance Commission offices has not been very well received in my constituency, and I promised to bring this fact to the attention of the minister at the first opportunity. As I think he is

aware, various organizations representing several sections of the community have protested the separation of these two departments. I never quite understood the reason for it because the work of these departments is so interrelated and deals with problems that are common to both departments.

The present situation causes a great deal of inconvenience. In my constituency some communities are 150 miles or more from the nearest unemployment insurance office. I am not going to give examples. I thought the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) and the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) dealt very well with that aspect so there is no need for me to repeat what they said in this connection. However, there are people in my constituency living up to 175 miles away from the nearest unemployment insurance office or manpower office and very often they require advice. For example, in some cases they are not quite certain how to fill out application forms, what the expression "availability for employment" means, and things of that nature. I think it is particularly necessary that these people have an opportunity to complete their applications correctly or to file their appeals properly. Under present conditions it is physically impossible for them to do so.

● (5:00 p.m.)

In the meantime, would it not be possible for the Unemployment Insurance Commission to provide officers who could visit some of these communities once a week and assist these people. For example, an officer could visit Nakusp which is approximately 130 miles away from the unemployment insurance office in Castlegar. An officer might also go to Kaslo which is about the same distance away, and periodically one might go to the North Lardeau country where many are employed but where the population is less dense. These officers could advise people how to complete application forms and enter appeals. I should like the minister to reply to this suggestion when he speaks at the conclusion of the debate on second reading.

I think there is a great opportunity for an improvement in public relations on the part of the commission. I suggest it would be a good idea for some of its officials to address trade unions periodically on the subject of applying for unemployment insurance and the necessary procedures and forms. They could inform the unions about the law generally and about applications in detail. They could do the same with chambers of commerce,