

Alleged Failure to Reduce Unemployment

• (4:40 p.m.)

The fact is that in my riding as in other parts of the province of Quebec and throughout Canada, there are three categories of unemployed: those who are registered, those who are waiting to be registered and those who are not registered.

The official statistics on the percentage of unemployed take into consideration only those who are registered for unemployment benefits. That is the reason why I strongly dispute the accuracy of these reports, because an unemployed worker who is waiting for permission to receive benefits is unemployed as much as the one already in receipt of them. Furthermore, the one who has not enough stamps in his book, not being registered, is more truly unemployed than the first two.

That is why, when speaking about unemployment, we must always include the three above-mentioned groups in order to assess accurately the increase of unemployment in a given area.

When registered unemployed have met the statutory requirements, everything is all right. However, those who are waiting—and it is on that point that I draw the attention of the minister—have registered with the regional office by letter. Now a letter may take two or three days to reach Chicoutimi; we must apply to the Chicoutimi office; because all unemployment insurance offices have been closed in our communities. The officials at that office have to get in touch with the head office in Montreal, and that may take a few days more. When the answer comes, sometimes a small detail is missing and everything must start again from the beginning.

During the Christmas season, I have seen—and I am not speaking through my hat—people who had to wait five or six weeks before being advised whether they qualified or not for unemployment benefits. I think a change is imperative.

The government thought that general centralization in Chicoutimi was the right answer. When previously we had Unemployment Insurance offices in Dolbeau, Roberval and Saint-Félicien, now everything is centralized in Chicoutimi. When the case is too complicated, the unemployed are told: "Come and see us." They must then travel 125 miles, in order to find out whether they will be given \$35 or \$36. This is not funny for the poor guy who has not earned a cent for the last five or

[Mr. Gauthier.]

six weeks. He has to go either by taxi—because he has no car—or by bus, in order to see those people and explain his case to them. Incidentally, I wish to point out that the people in charge, in these offices can not be blamed. I have met all these people during the Christmas season I have even contacted the authorities in the Employment offices. They are all full of goodwill. However, there is something wrong with the system. They say so themselves. It is imperative that the system be improved because distances are too large and communications too slow. And so, the unemployed worker feels cheated for two, three, four or even six weeks, and thinks of his family which must be fed.

Mr. Speaker, wonderful suggestions have been made to me, especially at the Employment Offices level, because in our areas we still have three Employment Offices, and I have passed on those suggestions to the hon. minister.

I think that the best suggestion made to me was that the minister consider the possibility of posting someone in each of the employment offices of the Unemployment Insurance Commission, an employee whose office would be located in that of the Department of Manpower and who could each day get in touch with the head office.

It would not require the rental of offices nor additional expenses. One or two employees of Chicoutimi could visit once, twice or three or four times per week the offices of Dolbeau, St. Félicien or Roberval and that would considerably improve relations with the unemployed.

I have spoken about the matter with the representatives of Chicoutimi and those of the Department of Manpower whose offices are now vacant. There are three in Dolbeau with telephones and all required means of communication. Now, they are only used on certain occasions to receive people from Chicoutimi who come two or three times. It would take at least five or six months to correct that situation which I feel is now quite bad. Indeed, as soon as I arrive in my constituency, my home fills up so that on a single Sunday afternoon, I had to deal with 52 complaints.

Mr. Speaker, it shows the extent of the work which must be done in those unemployment insurance offices of our areas. I like to welcome people and to help them, but I would rather not perform the work of civil servants. I know that this is the job of public employees and I am sure it has been brought