

Expedition of Public Services

and provincial governments millions of dollars in 1972. And any reports to the contrary are totally incorrect.

As a matter of fact, the welfare commissioner of the city of Toronto recently indicated that welfare expenditures would be reduced by some \$8 million as a direct result of the unemployment insurance program. Discussions have been proceeding with all provinces, including Ontario, in respect of the assignment of unemployment insurance benefits. A meeting has been arranged for March 21 in Toronto to review the procedural aspects for the assignment of unemployment insurance benefits.

I am further advised that the Toronto metro executive committee met yesterday and announced a \$2 million reduction from its welfare budget. This saving is not unconnected, I suggest, with the new unemployment insurance program and the special employment program. So we see substantial social welfare cost reductions predicted for the province of Ontario and other provinces, yet some people in Canada still say that social welfare costs are increasing as a result of the new unemployment insurance plan. To say the very least, that kind of misinformation is most unhelpful.

It should be noted that the old unemployment insurance program did not permit the assignment of unemployment insurance benefits, and this frequently resulted in persons being paid twice for the same period of time. The new Unemployment Insurance Act gives the Unemployment Insurance Commission the power to assign benefits where arrangements have been made with provincial and municipal authorities.

It has been suggested this afternoon that there should be a one-week waiting period. Surely an actuarially sound program must proceed according to actuarial principles. If we were to reduce the waiting period to one week, the premiums would have to be increased substantially and benefits would be reduced. Anyone who buys automobile insurance knows that the \$25 deductible policy is far more expensive than the \$100 deductible. A two-week waiting period was thoroughly discussed in committee and is the result of actuarial estimates.

It has also been suggested that there should be a greater degree of decentralization. Surely the hon. member is aware that since 1970 unemployment offices, including service offices and central offices have increased in number by 50 per cent and that during the same period telephone lines have increased by 65 per cent. Surely he is not unaware of the fact that every two weeks well over 600,000 cheques are processed and despatched to grateful families from coast to coast. It might be useful to emphasize some of the undoubtedly positive accomplishments of this, the world's finest program of unemployment insurance, a fact which is beyond dispute.

This does not mean to say that this department or the government is resting on its laurels. Both before and during the recent criticisms of the commission's claims processing procedures extensive action was taken to identify and correct any administrative deficiencies which could be the cause of the criticisms. The situation is now nearly back to normal, but the meaning of "normal" must be understood in the context of the magnitude of the commission's operations and the unfamiliarity of the

[Mr. Perrault.]

unemployed with the new act, regulations and administrative procedures.

Currently, payments are being made every two weeks to well over 600,000 persons. However, these persons are continually changing at the daily rate of 10,000 new persons added and about 8,000 persons returning to work or exhausting their claim. The effect of 10,000 new claims per day is reflected in inquiries to the commission as each person proceeds to ask for application forms and perhaps to query the two-week waiting period, request an explanation of his benefit rate or income tax deduction or object to a disqualification, disentitlement or notice of ineligibility, etc. About 2,000 persons per day are subject to a disqualification procedure. The commission is averaging over 50,000 inquiries per day, a 50 per cent increase over last year due to the new act, regulations and procedures.

There has been continuous monitoring of the operations under the new act and procedural changes have been made as experience dictated. During December it became apparent that there were three major problems. First of all, the first cheque took longer than expected to reach the claimant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. I regret that the time allotted to the hon. member has expired.

Mr. Perrault: Mr. Speaker, with the consent of the House may I finish my statement?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): The hon. member knows that the unanimous consent of the House is required for this. Is it agreed?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): I hear some no's.

Mr. Perrault: I thank the House for its courtesy.

Mr. Crouse: If you knew what was going on you would not need any extra time.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. I have rendered my decision and there should not be any argument.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, I trust I will not try to get by a House order regarding timing. It was agreed at the beginning of this debate that no member would ask for extra time. This afternoon we heard a lengthy reply by the Minister of Labour (Mr. O'Connell) to a motion which I think he completely misread. I may say that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Perrault) was rather more on target because this motion deals with the period of waiting, the disentitlement, the effect on status and the way the citizens of the country have been affected in a number of areas. My colleagues have spoken about them. I refer to service pensions, Canada Pension Plan disability payments, the unemployment insurance field. Now I wish to refer in particular to immigration.