

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Mr. Kierans: That is how we will modernize and improve our service, not by the mean and undocumented attacks of members such as the hon. member for Hillsborough. He cites incidents and refuses to discuss the general situation. He knows full well that 99 per cent of the people in this country for 99 per cent of the time receive their mail within 24 hours.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Let us have another round.

An hon. Member: Are there any more fairy tales?

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE—GOVERNMENT
POLICY RESPECTING MODIFICATION
OF OPERATION

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that neither I nor the parliamentary secretary to the Minister of Labour are likely to exceed the performance we have just witnessed.

I should like to direct the attention of the house to a question I asked on June 26. I asked the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) whether he had any statement on government policy or intended modification of the administration of unemployment insurance which he might be able to give to the house. I think perhaps I put the point of my question a little more directly earlier in the session when I asked him if he had in mind doing anything about what I called the dehumanizing of the administration of unemployment insurance.

The point of the question I raised arises out of a situation which goes back to early 1967 when a policy was adopted which involved the closing out of many of the local unemployment insurance offices, two of these were in my constituency. Incidentally, the adoption of this policy involved a decision not to proceed with the establishment of a third one which had been regarded as being necessary in the community of Campbell River. In connection with the question I asked the minister on June 26, I sent across to him a copy of a petition containing some 40 pages of signatures of the residents of the community of Campbell River. It was worded in this fashion:

We the undersigned, vigorously protest the complete lack of facilities at Campbell River to handle applications for Unemployment Insurance Benefits.

We request that the Federal Government immediately open and maintain office facilities at Campbell River to serve the public in this area.

I might point out that this petition actually has two variations. The formulation I have

[Mr. Kierans.]

just read I think presents the thinking of the people in a more positive way, but the original version under which some of the signatures were obtained states:

We, the undersigned, wish to discontinue payment and endorsement to any and/or all public services who are no longer of public service, namely, the Unemployment Insurance Commission, 66 Front Street, Nanaimo, B.C.

In other words, the people who initiated this petition were so exasperated they wanted to take the matter in their own hands and cease making payments of premiums to the Unemployment Insurance fund. I believe usually, in circumstances of this kind, we know that a certain number of people will readily attach their signatures to petitions without giving too much thought to them. Nevertheless, when there is smoke to this extent there must be fire lying somewhere underneath.

● (10:10 p.m.)

I should say I have a file on this subject which goes back to early 1967. Let me quote briefly from a letter which I received from the secretary of one of the larger unions in my area. It is dated February 13, 1967 and in part it reads:

The present system of a central office in Nanaimo covering all of Northern Vancouver Island is not working out at all. People have to wait for over a month for their claims to be processed and in talking to the manager in Nanaimo, he informed me they are snowed under with claims and away behind in processing same.

There is not too much wrong with the mailing system—

I should point out that this letter was written long before the present incumbent in the office of Postmaster General suggested that we mail our Christmas cards now for next Christmas. Let me quote again from the letter as follows:

There is not too much wrong with the mailing system, but there are many people who do not understand the forms and since they have no office in the immediate area to go to for assistance it is making it very awkward for these people—

There is a suggestion here that an unemployment insurance officer be situated in the municipality in the manpower office and should assist people in processing their claims. Following that, there was quite a long series of correspondence with the then Minister of Labour, the hon. Mr. Nicholson, and with the director of unemployment insurance. There was a great exchange back and forth of letters from the union officers and the administration. An attempt was made to clarify the situation, and admissions were also made that there were delays but that the commission