

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

communicate with the Unemployment Insurance Commission and I believe the commission recognized that fact when, in its 1966 reports, it had this to say:

The commission continued arrangements whereby agents are appointed to complete all the necessary documents in connection with applications for unemployment insurance benefits.

The commission believes that agents should be appointed to assist the people in making application for unemployment insurance benefits. Are these people expected to travel 150 miles to get this help in making application? The report continues:

In this way, applicants who cannot conveniently visit a commission office because of their location are able to make their application with a minimum of delay. This system substantially reduces the amount of correspondence with postal applicants.

According to this report the commission apparently wanted to reduce the amount of correspondence with postal applicants. However, the minister said on May 31, in reply to a complaint from the Summerside board of trade, that mail service could now be used extensively to carry out these operations. The letter continues:

● (4:50 p.m.)

In implementing its program the commission has improved its method of operation and has developed simplified procedures. The necessity for personal contact and inquiries is thereby reduced and insured persons and employers are not adversely affected as a result of the commission's policy.

This is not in accordance with the facts, Mr. Speaker. People do require assistance in filling out these forms, and I suggest that it is the responsibility of the commission and of the government to provide it. Although this policy may save a little money, nevertheless the Unemployment Insurance Commission is an agency of government. Its function is not only to save money. One of its most important functions—and this applies to every agency of government—is to provide the people of this country with a service for which they are paying in the form of taxation. I suggest that requiring applicants to travel 150 miles in order to visit their nearest regional Unemployment Insurance Commission office is not providing service. The letter continues:

The commission's objective has always been to provide a prompt and efficient service to those applying for benefit and it was with this aim, as well as with a view to economy, that certain changes were introduced—

I suggest, Mr. Speaker, that this is no excuse for not providing service. This is not improving efficiency; it is cutting down

[Mr. McQuaid.]

efficiency. It certainly does not give the people of Canada, the taxpayers of Canada, those services to which they are properly entitled under a properly administered unemployment insurance scheme.

The hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Howard) cited examples of interpretations of the section of the act that requires a person to prove his or her availability for work. He brought to the notice of the house instances of investigators employed by the Unemployment Insurance Commission actually putting words into the mouths of those who apply for unemployment insurance benefits, words that he felt and which I also feel they did not intend to use. I have also had examples of this practice that I should like to bring to the attention of the minister.

I have in my files a complaint from a woman who was interviewed by an investigator from the commission. Several months ago she had applied for unemployment insurance benefits and in her application had stated she was not available for work. That was correct; at that time she was not available for work. However, later she went to work and eventually was laid off as a result of a shortage of work. Once more she applied for unemployment benefits. The investigator came to her house but instead of sitting down and asking her to fill out the form he simply said to her: "I suppose there are no changes in the statement you made when you last applied for unemployment benefits?" Not fully realizing the significance of the question she replied that there were not. The investigator entered that answer on her form, packed his bag, left the house, and as a result she was advised a short time later that she was disqualified from receiving benefits because she was not available for work.

It is all very well to say that this woman had the right of appeal, but I suggest there are a lot of people in Canada today applying for unemployment insurance benefits who do not fully understand their rights in this connection. Not having anybody to advise them and being unable conveniently to travel 150 or 160 miles to the nearest regional office, they suffer the loss of their unemployment insurance benefits. I suggest that this is not as it should be.

Apparently the Unemployment Insurance Commission take great pride, and I think with some justification, in the fact that they are saving the taxpayer money as a result of the work of their investigators who travel all over the country. According to the 1966