

*Inquiries of the Ministry*

## DELAYS IN PAYMENT OF BENEFITS—RESOLUTION OF DIFFICULTIES AT BATHURST, N.B., OFFICE

**Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate):** Can the parliamentary secretary, who might have a more rational response to an important question, indicate whether he has received an assurance that the situation at Bathurst, New Brunswick, has been resolved and whether there has been a meeting this morning with the students and the clients involved? Finally, can he indicate why the unemployment insurance office was closed yesterday, which precipitated more concern?

**Mr. Ray Perrault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration):** I am pleased to attempt to answer that question, and I want to assure hon. members that this side of the House is just as concerned as they are about the unemployed.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Muir:** Why don't you do something about it then?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. May we have order, please. Perhaps the parliamentary secretary might reply to the question.

**Mr. Perrault:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The Chairman of the Unemployment Insurance Commission, Mr. Des-Roches, together with the regional director, Mr. Foster, has met with local groups in Bathurst. It has been determined that only a small number of delayed claims have been discovered and action has been taken on them immediately. However, suggestions by leaders of local groups for improving the service will be given every consideration, and the commission is prepared to adopt any suggestion which might lead to better service in the area.

**An hon. Member:** That is dishonest and you know it.

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. Again I notice there are at least four or five members who are seeking to ask supplementary questions on this matter. If hon. members feel that the whole question period this morning should be spent on this one item the Chair cannot object to that, but perhaps hon. members might give some thought to allowing the Chair to suggest that hon. members go to another subject and if there is time at the end we might return to this matter. I will give another five minutes or so to the consideration of this very important matter by recognizing first the hon. member for Hamilton West.

## DELAYS IN PAYMENT OF BENEFITS—REQUEST FOR INVESTIGATION BY COMMITTEE

**Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West):** Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my question to the parliamentary secretary. In view of the fact he said that there are some problems within the Unemployment Insurance Commission's administration and in view of the fact the minister emphatically indicated that he was in favour of the convening of the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration in order to deal with this matter, would the parliamentary secretary use his good influence in order to advise the Prime Minister to convene

[Mr. Trudeau.]

this committee so that this whole sordid mess can be looked into?

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member is making a suggestion rather than putting a question. For the moment I will recognize the hon. member for Oxford.

## DELAYS IN PAYMENT OF BENEFITS—SUGGESTED REOPENING OF LOCAL OFFICES

**Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question on the same matter which I should like to direct to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration who also has responsibility for the Unemployment Insurance Commission. Will the parliamentary secretary recommend to the Unemployment Insurance Commission that they reopen immediately the local offices that were closed about two years ago, at which time many members of the House in all parties warned that this would cause the mess that we now see? Perhaps this might help in resolving the problem sooner.

**Mr. Ray Perrault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration):** A number of additional unemployment insurance offices have been opened coincidentally with the establishment of the universality of the world's finest unemployment insurance program on January 1.

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Coates:** Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise on a question of privilege. A very serious situation has developed arising out of the original answer by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration with regard to the number of claims by claimants who are seeking benefits, that are not being looked after properly. The parliamentary secretary stated that either 1 per cent or less of those who are seeking benefits and who are entitled to them are not receiving the said benefits. This is the first time I have heard this figure mentioned.

**Some hon. Members:** Question.

**Mr. Coates:** Don't you worry about it, I will get to the question. When this matter was brought up in the House in December the Minister of Labour, who is now Minister of Manpower and Immigration but is still responsible for the Unemployment Insurance Commission, stated there was a 2 per cent backlog of claims not being processed properly. Later the chairman of the Unemployment Insurance Commission made a statement to the effect that 88 per cent—

• (1140)

**Mr. Speaker:** Order, please. I apologize to the hon. member but I must interrupt him for a moment. He took the floor on a question of privilege and the question of privilege should be identified immediately. Until now I would be inclined to think and to rule that this is a matter of debate rather than a question of privilege. Would the hon. member indicate immediately why he considers this is a matter of privilege?

**Mr. Coates:** This is not difficult to do, Mr. Speaker. The former Minister of Labour gave certain figures about