

have followed the course of this sort of legislation will recall that in the twenties the fund was absolutely bankrupt. There they had the advantage of a high level of employment during the war, as we did; then they had that collapse or recession, whatever you want to call it; and they had the same revolutionary condition in Europe at that time. There was the Russian revolution, the putsch in Germany, the trouble in Hungary and so on, and had it not been for unemployment insurance, I sometimes wonder what might have happened even in Great Britain.

I am not very much impressed by people who, when they have \$10 in their pockets, think they are millionaires and want to get rid of it, and when it is spent lean on the other fellow. I believe this unemployment insurance money belongs to the good people who paid into the fund. By the very nature of things, thousands of people who have paid into this fund will not draw a copper from it. I believe this parliament, not necessarily the government, but parliament—is charged with some responsibility with respect to the proper administration of that money because, as I have said before, I will take my chance on the working people of the country. They are the backbone of every country and of civilization itself; they always have been, and I hope they always will be as far as this dominion is concerned.

To the end of February of this year, that is in the past six years and eight months, benefits paid to workers under the act have totalled \$111,000,000; but in passing I might make a reference to that figure, having in mind the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mr. MacInnis). At one time, through circumstances over which no government had any control, we had 16,000 people in the city of Vancouver drawing unemployment insurance. They had a bad snow condition there this winter. My mind goes back to the thirties, when there were many people in the same position in Vancouver, and we had a great deal of trouble. This gives some indication of the cushion this form of legislation can provide under conditions of that kind.

The outlay of benefits naturally has been greater in the last three years because we had maximum employment during the war, and following the end of the war there were necessary lay-offs because of the change-over from the wartime to a peacetime economy. Then, of course, a great many more persons are covered now.

Not all the money to the credit of the fund has been contributed by employer, employee and the government. Since the act became operative, a total of more than \$34,000,000 has

[Mr. Mitchell.]

been earned from interest on investments and profit on sale of securities. The gross revenue of the fund to the end of February of this year was \$552,000,000.

It is our desire to bring as many as possible under coverage of the act. The bill to come before the house gives the unemployment insurance commission more authority in this respect. The idea is to reduce the number of excepted employments to the very minimum.

As instances, in 1943 it was provided that certain employees of hospitals and charitable institutions and employees of public utilities, owned by municipal, provincial and dominion governments could come under the act.

In 1946 we included lumbering and logging workers in British Columbia and employees in transportation by water. Recently, stevedoring has been added. The industries which remain excluded are those which are particularly difficult to insure.

There is another point I want to mention to the house. Hundreds of letters have come to my office in recent years and I know many more have been received by the unemployment insurance commission, suggesting that persons in insurable employment, who have been forced to give up work because of illness, should receive benefits. That, of course, is impossible on the present actuarial basis. It would require very much more substantial contributions on the part of employer and employee and the government. In any event, this was intended to be an unemployment insurance plan, not a combination of unemployment and sickness insurance.

Apart from those I have mentioned, there are other proposed amendments to the act which have been drafted to ensure better administration and to enable the unemployment insurance commission to deal more effectively with problems that have come up in the past two years. An act of this kind necessarily is subject to periodical change. In Great Britain their unemployment insurance act was passed in 1911, and during the succeeding quarter of a century fifteen amending bills were brought before parliament.

When members have studied the bill, I know the government will have the benefit of much in the way of constructive suggestion and criticism.

That will be welcomed because it is our desire to have an Unemployment Insurance Act which will function in the interests of the public to the highest possible degree.

Mr. ANGUS MacINNIS (Vancouver East): The minister has made a fairly comprehensive survey of the amendments he intends to bring in and of suggested improve-