

Unemployment Insurance Act

situation will be corrected. We are to have provincial centres where facts will be stored on an I.B.M. tape and where the entire operation will be taken over by computers.

The Liberal government did a great disservice to Canada when on the one hand, in choosing men for the cabinet it made choices on the basis of their interest and, in some cases, their ability, and then, on the other, established separate departments for manpower and for labour, thus giving one minister authority over employment and another authority over unemployment insurance matters. In my opinion I have never seen a more stupid action taken. It means that a guy can apply for benefits but that he need not necessarily apply for a job.

Mr. Nicholson: On a point of order. I hope the hon. member realizes that that change was made nearly one year before the Department of Manpower and Immigration came into existence.

Mr. Peters: I agree about the time when the decision may have been taken, but I think the minister will agree that the initial intention was to have two separate departments. Why, they are not even speaking cousins any longer. Originally the functions of both departments were included in the Department of Labour. As a matter of fact, in my area both these departments were in the same building. It was possible for the unemployment insurance people to make sure that applicants had registered for jobs before being entitled to benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act. Now the departments have been separated and they are in totally different areas. There may have been reasons for the separation, but I cannot think of them and I am not impressed by the way they operate separately.

I agree that if the Canadian labour force is to be increased by immigration, the Department of Manpower and Immigration will be involved in making it possible for people to work in Canada. Nevertheless, those who are in Canada and become unemployed will seek benefits, but this is unrelated to immigration. I am surprised that other members of parliament have not objected to the total separation of the functions carried on by the Departments of Labour, and Manpower and Immigration. So total is the separation in my area that the people in the manpower centres are not allowed to assist in the filing of benefit applications or appeal applications. They have been told by the minister to stay out of that

field totally. I have found that a person can walk into a Farm Credit Corporation office, ask for assistance, and get assistance from a civil servant in filling out a simple form. Similarly, he can go to his member of parliament or his minister for assistance with any problem.

• (4:00 p.m.)

Officials of the manpower centre have made it known, however, that they will not even help these people fill out the necessary form. They will not provide that common courtesy. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) appears to be very touchy about this, indicating that he is well aware of the difficulties which have developed in connection with unemployment insurance. The point has been reached at which consideration is being given in my area, as in others, to appointing a person who will assist applicants for benefits in all those areas where there are no offices at the present time. Everyone knows that among the 500,000 who are unemployed today there are a great many who are looking simply for labouring jobs, and who do not have the education necessary even to be eligible for a retraining program.

I admit that the training programs have done a great deal of good. But in my opinion a profound disservice was done when this scheme was taken out of federal jurisdiction and placed entirely under provincial jurisdiction, with the result that the federal government has nothing to say with regard to it and nothing to do except contribute the necessary funds.

The closing of unemployment insurance offices in so many areas has made it impossible for men of little education to appeal against decisions taken by the Unemployment Insurance Commission, particularly since it involves the completion of a form in writing. What shocks me is that we are proposing to amend the act without giving any consideration to this problem which, in my view, is a really important one. Consider the difficulty facing a man who wishes to make an appeal in my own area. No longer is there an office in the tritown district or at Kirkland Lake. It is necessary to go to Timmins in order to make an application, and Timmins is 130 miles from the tritown area. Most of the people there are unable to travel to the Timmins office in order to lodge their appeals and for this reason they either write to their members of parliament or give up their possible right to benefit.