

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

The hon. member for Halifax (Mr. McCleave) made fairly extensive reference to the Gill commission report which, as we all know, was tabled in 1962. I must admit it has been quite some time since I really looked at that now rather hoary document, but I notice that my copy appears to be fairly well worn and therefore at some point I must have spent some time looking through it. If I have not looked at it recently it is because it has now become such a hoary document that one wonders whether it is worth looking at. One wonders whether we may have another commission of inquiry into unemployment insurance which will completely negate the recommendations of the Gill commission. In any event, for a long period we have had no indication from the government of what it is prepared to do about the Gill commission recommendations, and so it seems hardly worth while bringing the name of that commission into the debate on a bill amending the Unemployment Insurance Act.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare referred to a general revision of the act. Some of us are getting a bit sick and tired of hearing references to a general revision of the Unemployment Insurance Act when year after year goes by and nothing even remotely related to such a revision appears on the order paper. One thing we should take into account is that while there has been no general revision of the act some rather radical changes have been made in recent times in the manner in which unemployment insurance is administered. These have been made without any real reference to parliament and have resulted from reorganization by the minister. Undoubtedly they created problems across the country in the application of the act.

The problems that have arisen in providing benefits must be taken into consideration. The minister made reference to the uncovering of abuses in drawing from the funds provided under the act. More than once I have stated to gatherings of working people that the unemployment insurance fund belongs to the working people of Canada and anybody who draws money from it to which he is not rightly entitled is in exactly the same position as a person who reaches into the pocket of the man sitting beside him and removes money from that pocket.

In his references to a stepped-up program to track down and eliminate abuses it seems to me that in effect the minister was admitting that many people in Canada have

become so disgusted with the delay in making changes in the arrangements under the act that they have become accustomed to regard it as a form of welfare payment to which they have entitlement if in need, whether or not they meet its technical requirements. Enough of them have encountered frustrations in trying to secure what they thought was rightfully theirs under the act that they have been encouraged to short circuit some of the administrative procedures, rules and regulations. I cannot recall exactly the figure which the minister gave as the amount of money garnered from the fund illegally, but the responsibility for that must not be placed solely on the people who have been successful in getting it. Rather it should be attributed to the general state of mind which has been allowed to develop toward the fund and its purposes, caused by government inactivity in bringing about real, useful and meaningful changes in the unemployment insurance program.

When the minister referred to a general revision of the act he said this was a matter of great concern and that a proposal would be introduced as soon as practicable. That was a statesmanlike phrase in the great Liberal tradition. In fact I could not help but think that perhaps in the light of certain developments within his own party the minister was trying to wrap the cloak of Mackenzie King around himself and express the kind of concept developed by the Liberal party which is sometimes said to have begun in 1919. I suggest to the minister that in the light of 1968 that kind of cloak is becoming a bit hoary and that even among the members of his own party there are those who are not too satisfied with this slow and measured pace toward the millennium.

● (12:40 p.m.)

I suppose I could attempt to incite the minister into indicating when he thinks it will be practicable to introduce a general revision of the act, but quite frankly I do not know whether it would be worth while. I realize that unless the minister has something in his mind different from the language he used when introducing the bill the answer I would get would be evasive. In any event the question of when it will be practicable to bring in a general revision of the act has become an academic exercise at best as long as the present government remains in office because it always seems to be a question this year, next year, some time, never, proposition. One