

ployed was thus greatly reduced, since many of them had been waiting eight or ten weeks now to get their unemployment insurance cheques. Is the inquiry over now and can the hon. minister tell us whether something is being done in order to improve that situation?

To which the Minister replied as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I must admit that the allegation regarding any slowness in the unemployment insurance office in Sherbrooke has not come to my attention, but I will look at it as soon as possible and report to the hon. gentleman.

There again, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this government's left hand does not know what its right hand is doing. The parliamentary secretary told me he would look into the matter and ten days later there are still unemployed people waiting for their cheques and no inquiry has been initiated as yet.

That is why I say that this is not the time for inquiries, but for improvements, for telling the truth about the Unemployment Insurance Act and refraining from "electioneering", promising Canadians pie in the sky.

Before a legislation is enacted, I suggest it should be seen to that administrative services required to meet demands under the legislation be set up.

[English]

Mr. Ray Perrault (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Labour): Mr. Speaker, the kindest thing that can be said about the hon. member's remarks is that they are short on facts and long on emotional appeal not based on fact. The hon. member, despite the comments in the House the other day, has yet to contact me personally in respect of any of these so-called delay cases. Unfortunately he was not in the House the other evening, March 14, when we undertook an investigation of the situation at Sherbrooke at the instigation of one hon. member. We were advised by the Unemployment Insurance Commission that between January 24 and March 14 the hon. member had submitted to the Sherbrooke office a grand total of 132 cases, not 450. In any event, as of March 10, 1972, the Sherbrooke office was in the process of answering only 19 cases submitted by the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin). This hon. member had been interested in the list he had at that time at the local office.

I hope some hon. members will not try to seize upon this issue of alleged delays in unemployment insurance benefits in order to make some sort of political capital out of it—

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

Mr. Beaudoin: You do this, rather than me.

Mr. Perrault: —because that is trafficking in human misery. There were some delays identified in January and February because of systems problems. These amounted to about 5,000 cases. These cases have long ago been corrected. We have no significant backlog in unemployment insurance operations in this country.

• (2230)

There will always be some cases delayed initially because information is not available from the claimant or his employer, or there are administrative errors; but this amounts to less than 2 per cent of new claims and less than two-tenths of one per cent of current claims. There is constant monitoring going on throughout the system and in all offices to ensure that claims are processed as speedily as possible, and there are quality assurance controls to keep the number of errors to an absolute minimum. Even though people complain of computers, there have been no major breakdowns in our five computer systems and no major delays caused by equipment breakdowns. Our greatest difficulty has been with the manual pay system which was designed as a short-term, interim system in the introduction of the new act.

Finally, one should look at the good points of the program. The benefits paid in December, 1971, were 70 per cent higher than in 1970; the number of weeks paid were 13 per cent higher and the average weekly payments were 50 per cent higher. In the month of January, for example, \$130 million was paid out to the unemployed people of Canada from coast to coast, thousands in the province of Quebec, most of them paid on time. In January of 1971, \$85 million was paid out and in 1972 fewer people were unemployed than in 1971.

Let us not forget, Mr. Speaker, that there are human beings working in the unemployment insurance and when we hear these statements about callous, indifferent unemployment insurance staff we are attacking a substantial number of people in the work force of this country who are doing a dedicated job and working overtime every week in order to give service to this hon. member's constituents and thousands of other people in the country. I resent very much the kind of attack made in the House tonight about people who are 16 weeks late receiving payments. Let the hon. member bring his list to the House instead of standing up every day attacking unemployment insurance and making this inaccurate, emotional appeal.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.34 p.m.