

Oral Questions

people who actually drew unemployment insurance benefits last month and can he tell the House whether that number exceeded the total number of unemployed in the country as was the case in the first five months of the year?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Hon. members know that they cannot ask questions that require the giving of statistics. I allowed the first question because it was perhaps general. It is always difficult to judge, until the question is asked, whether statistical information is required from a minister. Perhaps the question might be allowed and if the minister will reply we will then go on to the next supplementary question.

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, with respect to the hon. member's question and your remarks I would prefer and would ask to be given an opportunity to obtain precise figures which I will be very pleased to give the House at the earliest opportunity. I do not have the exact figures for that month available right now.

Mr. Hellyer: At the same time would the minister give an explanation to the House of how it is possible for more people in fact to be drawing unemployment insurance than Statistics Canada lists as being unemployed?

TIME OF INTRODUCTION OF AMENDMENTS TO ACT

Mr. Frank Howard (Skeena): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Could I ask the Minister of Labour to tell the House precisely when he will be introducing proposals to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, on those amendments—

Mr. Howard: Mr. Speaker, I chose the wrong minister. The shuffling of that deck of jokers makes it difficult to remember. May I ask that question of the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, if he is the appropriate minister?

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, without accepting the premise of the hon. member's comment about jokers or decks, I hope to offer to the House the views of the government on amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act in the very near future, and I think that will be a subject for immediate discussion with the House leader with regard to timing and procedures.

Mr. Fairweather: Mr. Speaker, on a question of privilege—

Mr. Speaker: The hon. member for Fundy-Royal rises on a question of privilege.

Mr. Fairweather: Mr. Speaker, may I say through you how unusual and pleasant it is to have the ministers grace us with their presence today. I hope it is a resolution that will be maintained.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Mr. Hellyer.]

PROVISION OF ASSISTANCE TO CLAIMANTS AT LOCAL LEVEL

Mr. Elmer M. MacKay (Central Nova): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Manpower and Immigration. In view of nation-wide concern, can the minister inform the House what steps are being taken to provide the type of assistance on the local level to UIC claimants that used to be available and which is sadly lacking at the present time?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would be glad to describe the measures that have been taken but I think the reply would exceed the time limit for an answer to a question. However, I believe that early in this session we will have an opportunity to examine all aspects of unemployment insurance including those questions already raised about the cost of the scheme and measures taken to improve the services as well to eliminate abuses.

[Translation]

MEASURES TO ELIMINATE DELAY IN PAYMENT OF BENEFITS

Mr. Gérard Laprise (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I should like to put a supplementary question.

Since the minister has just announced that he will as soon as possible introduce amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act, could he state whether, meanwhile, steps will be taken to improve the administration of the act so as to avoid undue delays and unjustifiable errors which now occur?

[English]

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Yes, Mr. Speaker, I am satisfied that there is an increasing improvement in the administration of the commission's activities although unquestionably it leaves a lot to be desired yet.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

REQUEST FOR MORE LOCAL OFFICES TO EXPEDITE PAYMENT OF CLAIMS

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question. Will the minister open more local UIC offices in order to speed up payment of legitimate claims and to at least stop the drain on the fund?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, without accepting the premise of the question I might say that we are opening additional offices and providing facilities in manpower offices to deal with unemployment insurance matters. We have many more arrangements that I will be glad to detail to the House.

Mr. Grafftey: Is the minister aware of the cruel hardships that current delays are imposing on many Canadians? They are going on welfare.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please.