

*Social Services*

If I were to get \$2,000 more than I usually draw in family allowances it seems to me I would notice. The fact that I get an extra \$2,000 in benefits does not automatically mean that it is due to me, it is something that does not belong to me!

What is to be done for example in a case like the unemployment insurance incident I referred to earlier? People imagine that if the UIC paid \$2,000 too much it was not aware of it. Imagine a citizen saying he did not know! "If you got an overpayment of \$2,000 you have to pay it back!" Generally speaking, I must say that people were aware of it.

Again recently, unemployment insurance recipients came to see me at my office. Yet we know very well that full-time students are not entitled to unemployment benefits. He was overpaid by mistake because the inquiry had not been completed and a false statement was made.

In such cases, Mr. Speaker, the Unemployment Insurance Commission takes the situation into account. In the case I just mentioned there are two important elements: first an administrative error and, second, a false statement. This is altogether different from a case where there has been a clerical error, for example, and the individual receives a cheque for \$182 when in fact the benefits should not be more than \$172. I can understand an average man not realizing he is getting \$10 more a week. But I am sure he can tell the difference when he applies for unemployment benefits to which he is not entitled.

Mr. Speaker, the UIC takes into account specific cases and the situation of the person who has been overpaid. Where for instance repaying the overpayment leads to undue hardship, I suggest, Mr. Speaker, and I am convinced that the appropriate officials should, where there has been no dishonesty, schedule repayments so that the claimant can refund within the prescribed period, while abiding by the existing Act and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, this is a very simple concept because it takes responsibility into account. We, as managers of the Unemployment Insurance Fund, are using our money, not only government money. One third of the money comes from the Government. As we know there are three partners in this...

employers and taxpayers also are involved. We have absolutely no right to be free-handed in the management of assets that come from the Government. But we have no right either, and still much less, to be free handed with moneys that are entrusted to us by taxpayers, moneys entrusted to us by companies and moneys contributed by the employees.

Because of the very nature of payments and the source of those funds, we must make absolutely sure that we are dealing fairly with all Canadians. It would be unfair, for instance, to those who had contributed, if an overpayment caused by an administrative error, is automatically written off. Some might suggest that the matter already was dealt with in another Private Member's Bill, right at the beginning, I remember it was in 1984 or 1985; it said that any debt to Revenue Canada should be written off. Well, simply preparing my income tax return and stating that I owe a debt and I will have it written-off... Nothing is as simple nor as nice!

Administrative errors of this kind reflect badly on our competence.

In closing, I repeat that federal employees must be guided by legislation which bars them from making negative value judgments. They also need such legislation for their own personal satisfaction. An honest citizens also want the money they provide for the poor to be spent wisely because, all too often, people jump to conclusions.

**Mr. Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. The hour provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired.

Pursuant to Standing Order 42(1), the order is taken off the *Order Paper*.

It being 3 p.m., this House stands adjourned until Monday at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 3(1).

The House adjourned at 3 p.m.