

*Supply—Labour*

had hoped this afternoon to make some observations which relate indirectly, and sometimes perhaps directly, to the Unemployment Insurance Commission. The reason I feel that I should do so at this time is that since the debate on the spending estimates of the government is now restricted to 30 days the minister's estimates may not be before the house again. So, I feel I should make these brief observations at this time.

We have been promised by successive governments for years that the Unemployment Insurance Act would be revised. I think every member of the house understands why a long time is needed to prepare a revision of this act. I do not think there is any federal act that has been the cause of more individual hardship, contention and problems than has this particular one. If anyone has doubts as to my observations, I think any member in this house would support my views. I do not suppose there has been a member in the house who has not had constant problems relating to the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act, and I do not think there is any federal act that is more in need of revision. The whole concept of the act seems to be misunderstood by a vast majority of the public. Many persons seem to think that unemployment insurance is some sort of pension fund, and if they have never drawn on it they are entitled to do so. This is something like fire insurance in respect of which you pay in and may never have to use it. Undoubtedly when the present act was established a situation existed in Canada where there was anything but full employment. Even during the last few years when we had almost total employment in many parts of the country, many strange things have come about and people have been obliged to make the contributions to the unemployment insurance fund. Under the strict interpretation of the act these people were never intended to pay into the fund. Certainly many professional people who come under the act will never collect the insurance. Nevertheless they are obliged to pay. I know I had to pay it myself on one occasion when I was a law student. This sort of anomaly must be corrected. The minister has told us that there will be a new act soon. I hope it will be very soon.

• (4:00 p.m.)

Despite the difficulties I believe the act has worked out very well, but there certainly is much need for improvement. I suppose if one wished to do so, one could spend many hours in the house reciting inequities, inequities and

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

anomalies which appear in the present act. People have received unemployment insurance who should never have received it. On the other hand, there are many cases where people should have been paid unemployment insurance and were not. I am sure those who administer the act are aware of these problems. When administering a law one has to carry out the law and the regulations as they read; there is not much room for discretion. There is, however, one plea which I should like to make to the minister at this time. In view of the fact we are advised that the new act will be ready, we hope before long, and in view of the fact that the present act is enforced strictly, I would suggest that in some cases the enforcement of the new act might be a little less strict. At one time I acted as a crown attorney and I know, as I believe most of us know, that if every small bylaw or other law were enforced by the police officers there is not one person in this chamber or in the country who would not have had a conviction for some petty offence. For example, I might mention the speeding laws under the highway traffic act.

There are situations such as these in respect of which I believe discretion and common sense must be used in the enforcement of the law. Those persons who presently are charged with the responsibility of administering the Unemployment Insurance Act certainly are very enthusiastic. They are doing a wonderful job so far as enforcement of the act is concerned. They are providing a good deal of money for the fund which will be available for a rainy day. This is fine; but I think a great many inequities have resulted. I should like to ask the minister to use his good offices in this regard. I know that enforcement does not come directly under the responsibility of the minister, but I would hope that he would try to alleviate some of the difficulties.

There are two problems in particular which I should like to mention. One is the reign of terror which has been carried out in respect of the barbers of this country. I know that in some instances, in places such as Toronto and Montreal, there are hairdressers who employ people and pay them a salary. In these cases they pay into the unemployment insurance fund, and this is quite proper. However, in some cases the barber rents the premises and then sublets a chair to another barber. They each buy their own supplies. I know of a case—and this is quite general—where the officers arrived at the barber shop and said, "You have to pay unemployment insurance". On occasion I have advised barbers not to pay it