

Oral Questions

standing committee. Perhaps the hon. gentleman would like to peruse the proceedings there.

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UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE**BENEFIT CONTROL—ALLEGED USE OF IMPROPER METHODS BY OFFICERS IN OBTAINING STATEMENTS**

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the minister responsible for unemployment insurance. It arises as a result of statements made regarding questionable actions of benefit control officers. In view of the fact that Parkdale Community Legal Services has charged that "it is clear the benefit control officers have been coached in methods of extracting statements that are damaging to the claimant", would the minister issue instructions in no uncertain terms that such practice is to be discontinued immediately?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I have already done so. I might say that I welcome the report of Parkdale Community Legal Services, as does the chairman of the advisory committee of the Unemployment Insurance Commission to whom it was directed. The chairman assured me this morning that the committee will contact the people who prepared the report and look into the activities of the unemployment insurance commission which were criticized by them, with protection of any claimants involved, as part of the advisory committee's over-all examination of the benefit control operation.

Mr. Alexander: Pending receipt of and action taken on the report and recommendations, if any, of the advisory committee, will the minister assure the House and advise benefit control officers that no interviews or statements related thereto will be used in considering disqualification unless and until claimants have been informed of their rights, the purpose of the interview and how the information they offer will be used? Can the minister give us that assurance pending receipt of this report?

• (1420)

Mr. Andras: Mr. Speaker, that is the intention of my instructions to the Unemployment Insurance Commission in the past.

BENEFIT CONTROL—INQUIRY AS TO TIGHTENING OF INTERPRETATION OF "SUITABLE WORK" AND SECRET ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS

Mr. Mark Rose (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, I would like to direct a supplementary question to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration. Has the Unemployment Insurance Commission in the past three months tightened up its interpretation of "suitable work", and have there been any new and secret administrative decisions taken recently about which parliament and the public have no knowledge?

[Mr. Macdonald (Rosedale).]

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I would say the answer to that is no. The benefit control operation was introduced in June or July of last year and has been continuing with certain refinements, about which I have advised the House, since that time. So I do not think the allegation is correct.

Mr. Rose: Since the previous minister of manpower and immigration defended the new UIC program on the grounds that more generous benefits took the load off provincial and municipal welfare expenditures, has there been any change in policy deliberately to transfer desperate UIC claimants, and the cost associated with them, to the provincial and municipal welfare rolls?

Mr. Andras: Very definitely no.

REQUEST FOR REOPENING OF OFFICES IN RURAL AND SMALL TOWN AREAS

Mr. Heward Grafftey (Brome-Missisquoi): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. Will the minister now reopen UIC offices that were shut in rural and small town areas in order to assure the House that the thousands of Canadians now unfairly disqualified in these areas, and who are available for work, will have their claims processed fairly and promptly?

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, without accepting the premise of the hon. member's question, I have indicated before and I indicate again that a reorganization of the commission is pending and should be announced shortly.

Mr. Grafftey: As a supplementary—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I see 15 members who are seeking to ask supplementaries. We will not have that many. The Chair will recognize two or three, and if hon. members then want to have a debate on this subject we can use the rest of the question period. For the moment the Chair recognizes the hon. member for Brome-Missisquoi.

Mr. Grafftey: Will the minister inform the House how the UIC offices for these areas know if a man is available for work when the offices are over 70 miles away from where he lives and there is no liaison with the local placement officers?

Mr. Andras: If the hon. member will give me specific examples I will look into them and advise him later.

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ENERGY**PROPOSED NUCLEAR REACTOR DEVELOPMENT ON STODDART ISLAND, N.S.—NEGOTIATIONS WITH DEPARTMENT—MEETING OF SAFETY STANDARDS**

Mr. J. M. Forrestall (Dartmouth-Halifax East): Mr. Speaker, I wish to direct a question to the Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources. It has to do with reports