

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

come to an agreement which would spare him a series of inconveniences since, not being eligible for the benefits, he must count only on unemployment assistance or social assistance. Therefore, we should try to find a satisfactory formula and solve this problem.

Right this day, at noon, I had the opportunity to write a letter for one of my constituents who was complaining that he could not draw unemployment insurance benefits. He had been declared unavailable, because last fall, towards the end of November, he had suffered an accident. His doctor gave him a certificate stating that he is able to go back to work. Now, the unemployment insurance officer, who has not examined the worker—it is exactly what I am saying in this notice of appeal to the board of referees—decided that the worker is unavailable for work, unable to do the work that should be done at this time of the year. The strange thing about it all is that, at this period of the year, the officers know very well that this seasonal worker, a lumberman, has no work available because all operations in the bush are finished everywhere for the season. Here is proof that the officers are overzealous in trying to deprive a lumberman of unemployment insurance benefits by offering him a possible or probable job in the bush.

I remember that four or five years ago, payment of benefits had been suspended for close to 300 workers in the Kamouraska riding and a good many in Témiscouata, in fact up to Rimouski. It almost created a scandal. Why? Because a high official of the commission had come at one time to the Rivière-du-Loup office and had felt that there were too many unemployed in the district.

It is not the people's fault that they live in an economically underprivileged area. It is not necessary for an official to leave the Montreal office and try to penalize all those who are having unemployment trouble. Of course, that situation has been settled; but I have seen government employees working nights to find the names and addresses of unemployed workers and sending them employment offers. Then they had to work nights too in order to pay those people their benefits, for the official's decision had obviously fallen through. We met a high official of the Department of Labour, who was the chief commissioner of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. He understood the problem and the matter was settled advantageously. But why let these workers suffer a

[Mr. Dionne.]

month because they have problems due to lack of income, because they were unemployed?

Mr. Speaker, I now conclude my remarks because I did not want to speak too long on the subject since I am anxious, like most hon. members, to see this bill passed. However, I cannot resume my seat without stressing a particular point which quite impressed me.

In passing, I wish to mention at once that even if I come from the Kamouraska area, this does not mean necessarily that the examples which I give bear the signature of the officials in the offices of my area. Not at all. There are officials in the Montreal offices and in many areas. Having been in contact with workers right across the province for ten years, from 1952 to 1962, I happen to receive correspondence from almost everywhere.

I shall not mention the place where this letter came from, but the fact remains that it was written by an official on a letterhead of the commission following a decision of the board of referees. The official in question had rendered a decision by which the unemployed who was awaiting benefits was disqualified. However, the unemployed, faced with his problems, appealed to the board of referees where his situation was discussed. In its conclusion, the board says this.

It is absolutely disgusting. One would never think that people could say such things, but to write them, on top of that!

During their discussions, the members of the board of referees recognize that the reason why this man stopped working may be a valid one from the human point of view, but not in the eyes of the law, since it is considered to be a personal reason. That is why they have no alternative but to uphold the decision of the unemployment insurance office and reject the appeal.

I would suggest to the hon. Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) that he should be careful in choosing officials who have to make decisions. As I said at the beginning of my remarks, there are very good, highly competent and understanding officials—I know some. On the other hand, I know others who are not qualified to do the work they do and who come to conclusions that are very unfavourable to an unemployed man who has to contend with poverty. Those are the ones that should be watched.