

Supply—Labour

some of us, the hon. member for Vancouver East and I in particular, have emphasized how unfair we feel it is, and how unfair the workers feel it is, that a worker on unemployment insurance, because there is no work for him, is cut off benefits if he happens to take ill, even though there is still no work for him. There are still wider changes that some of us might advocate, but it seems to me this is an immediate request that should be met, namely that when a worker goes on benefits and qualifies for them in the usual way, he should not have those benefits cut off because he takes ill. It has happened to a good many workers who have been on benefits and have not known of this regulation that on a certain day of the week when they were supposed to report they have sent their wives to collect the benefits and the wife is asked where her husband is. She says that he is at home ill, and immediately he is cut off unemployment insurance benefit, at a time when he needs it more than ever, despite the fact that there is still no job for him.

We have developed that argument so fully in previous debates that I do not need to go into it in detail now, but I say hopefully that I trust the minister will give the matter very active study during the recess. When he consults his departmental officials on the matter I am sure he will find that it has been studied by his officials and there must be quite a body of material on it.

One other supporting argument I should like to make is that away back in the November, 1944, issue of "Canadian Affairs", a pamphlet put out by the wartime information board which was sent mainly to the troops overseas to tell them what was going on back home, this question was dealt with as follows:

Unemployment insurance only covers the worker who has lost a job and is still available for employment. If you are sick, you aren't available for employment—so you don't get unemployment insurance. Once health insurance is finally put into operation, it probably won't be long until the Unemployment Insurance Act is amended to provide for payment of benefits during the period of a workman's illness. If that happens then a worker off for sickness would get unemployment insurance sickness benefit to make up for lost wages and would have his medical and hospital expenses met out of the health insurance fund—to which he has been contributing.

I recognize that we have not yet the health insurance which that very pamphlet forecast as something to be expected in the near future. But I suggest that if the Department of National Health and Welfare is too slow in proceeding with health insurance, the Minister of Labour might give a lead in this field by bringing in the kind of amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act that was

forecast in that "Canadian Affairs" pamphlet sent overseas to the troops in November, 1944.

I need not go into the matter further, because the records of *Hansard* are full of arguments on the point. In this corner of the house we have felt at times that we had sufficiently made our point to hope that the amendment would be forthcoming soon. I hope the minister's study between now and the fall will bear fruit.

Mr. Gregg: I can assure my hon. friend of a study at least.

Mr. Gillis: I should like to point out that considerable study is necessary on the point raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. For example, in many industries the worker pays into a sick benefit fund. He pays for that insurance against a time of unemployment because of sickness. At the same time he contributes to the unemployment insurance fund which provides for benefits during a period of unemployment. When the worker takes ill he is entitled to collect the insurance for which he has been paying because he is not able to carry on his regular work. The sick benefit that he draws amounts to perhaps ten per cent of what his normal wages would be. Under the circumstances, with the worker away from work because of sickness and collecting insurance that he has paid for, I think he is also legitimately entitled to receive unemployment insurance benefits for which he has already paid, because he is only receiving about ten per cent of his normal wages.

I refer particularly to the steel and coal industries in my part of the country. The worker is placed in the position that if he applies for unemployment insurance under the circumstances I have described, the company will immediately take the stand that he has severed his connection with them as an employee, and his pension rights are affected. He has a pension plan, and if he ceases his employment then he loses his pension rights.

This subject has been a controversial one for a number of years in my part of the country. I am questioned about it all the time. I think the worker is entitled to the unemployment insurance for which he has paid. I think he is entitled to collect the sick benefit insurance for which he has paid. I am asked whether a man should apply for unemployment insurance, and I have to warn him that if he does, it is taken as an indication that he has severed his connection with the company, that he is no longer an employee, and that he will lose out on the pension scheme in which he has participated to protect his future.