

direction to do the job. The letter I have just referred to was prompted, I may say, by an advertisement that appeared in the Vancouver *Province* for Thursday, February 18 last. It is headed "suburban Service for UIC Claimants" and goes on to list handy addresses where people can obtain "closer to home services" from the commission. Yet if one of my constituents has a problem he wants to discuss with a properly qualified claims officer of the commission, not one can be reached within less than 50 miles and most have to go a good deal further than that.

This letter goes on to point out that during the two previous months interviews, investigations and phone calls had taken up practically half the working day for one person in one local union office. It continues:

In other words, this office has replaced the now closed Unemployment Insurance office that used to be in Port Alberni. In addition to the technical problems at this end the new computer in Vancouver has just raised particular hell. Some legitimate claims have taken as much as two months to unscramble and there are still some being processed.

The letter then gives a detailed outline of the situation, and at the end of the letter there is a postscript which I offer to the minister for this consideration. It reads:

You can tell the Unemployment Insurance Commission people in Ottawa that we want some service for our members and if we cannot get it in the way that we have suggested then we have fully qualified stenographic help in this office and the UIC can give them a course of instruction, and help pay the cost of their wages for supplying a service that is legitimately the cost of the Commission.

I have another letter from what is commonly referred to in British Columbia as the Loggers Local of the IWA. Its offices are located in Vancouver but they serve a very wide stretch of territory in the logging industry. The letter talks of the particular conditions of the last winter. Normally, the office might handle 20 inquiries in the December 1 to January 31 period. The letter continues:

This year we have been besieged with more than one hundred calls. We obviously are not the only ones receiving complaints as it has been nearly impossible to make telephone connection with any of the numbers (listed and unlisted) that we have for various Pacific Coast U.I.C. offices. Many times we have had to resort to letters to try to find someone to provide some answer to a claimant's complaint. Even when telephone connection is made, it is a matter of days (or longer) before any kind of answer is provided.

The inquiries and complaints may be mainly divided into two groups. The first is the group that file and a month later have either received absolutely nothing or some who have received bi-weekly forms and a punched code card which indicates that no decision has been made in their claim. The second group are those who not only have a frustrating wait before anything is received from the U.I.C., but then they finally receive a letter or a punch code card "number 5" which advises them they have insufficient contributions. From their own knowledge and from our records, we know that the computer has been given erroneous information. The claimant is forced to go through a time consuming and often costly process of obtaining a duplicate record of U.I.C. contributions for the past two years. This again is time consuming and when finally completed and submitted (for the second time) to the U.I.C. office, he then commences the delay problem experienced by the first group.

The answers being provided to us by Commission officers are:

- a) There has been a constant flood of claims
- b) New staff hired are inexperienced
- c) The Commission is using a new "faster" type computer

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d) There is a lack of communication between the Commission Office and the separate computer centre. The Commission Office does not know what the computer is doing for (or to) a claimant.

The answers are no answer! They do not speed up the handling of claims for benefit. There is no evidence of feeding the computer the correct information the first time. What effort would it require for the computer to advise the Commission office what it is doing to a claimant's claim for benefits?

• (4:40 p.m.)

Then, the letter goes on to refer to the bulk system and what that has done as far as some of their members are concerned:

Our members are not only unhappy, they have been made angry by frustration. Many have been forced into financial hardship. This government has dangled a tantalizing carrot—a white paper on future unemployment insurance benefits—but has failed to even properly provide existing benefits. This government needs to be reminded that an unemployed person needs benefits when he is unemployed—he and his family cannot live on nothing. Retroactive benefits are not the answer after a man has used up his savings or gone into debt or his employment is resumed.

Attached is a list of details about particular claims problems. I have had occasions when problems have come to me directly. I have picked up the phone and called the regional office in Vancouver, as a result of which something happened. I know of one or two instances when people have communicated directly with the Minister of Labour about a particular problem. Probably he has picked up the phone and obtained results. The number of people who do that kind of thing is very small, and the number of people who should have to do that kind of thing should also be very small. This may not be a problem all across the country, for the minister has said, if I recall his statement correctly, something like 96 per cent of claims are being processed on time. I do not know whether that is a national average or that an analysis has been made of any regional or district average. I do suggest that when this type of situation develops after the commission has had from 1967 until 1971 to iron out the bugs in closing the local offices, there must be something wrong with the concept of administration.

I think this inhuman, depersonalization of the system is basically wrong and that perhaps some of the so-called efficiency experts who may have been engaged by the government or the commission to advise the administration on how to use electronic devices have overlooked what must be a very important factor in any insurance scheme operated socially or otherwise. I mean the ability of an individual claimant to have some kind of personal contact with someone who is fully qualified to discuss a particular situation and give proper advice.

One of the steps taken was the implementation of the program of so-called unemployment insurance agents. As far as I know, these people are not properly trained claims officers. From information I have they may be able to help an individual fill out an original form, but if there is any real problem they are not competent, trained or qualified, and do not have the communications facilities to deal with these problems.