

Unemployment Assistance

abnormal, the federal government should intervene for the purpose of making a contribution at least.

We have intervened with the result that this formula will work once the assisted population of a province reaches 45 per cent of the total population of that province. We will then share 50 per cent, on a basis to be determined, not by us even consultatively but by the provinces and the municipalities themselves. I do not know of anything that is more generous than that. I do not know of anything that is equal to it anywhere else. The hon. member for Hamilton West (Mrs. Fairclough), or was it someone else, suggested that we should look after the administration of some phase of this question. She acknowledges she did. I doubt that any province would agree to that, and no province I think should ask that that be done nor should we accede to it because it would be impossible for the federal government to administer, particularly for that portion of the unemployed who are not capable of working. Those are the people whose circumstances are known by the welfare inspectors on the local level. It would not be possible, I believe, in a large state like ours, to embark upon a policy of centralization without doing great harm to the welfare of the individuals concerned.

Now, I will admit that there might be an argument with regard to the unemployed employables because of our having assumed responsibility for unemployment insurance. But there again I would think a different kind of situation prevails because if you want to add to the economic costs all you have to do is centralize your administration in respect of a small number of people. Let us remember that this whole act is operating at a time when we have the highest level of employment in our country. None of us wants to see a decrease in the present high level of employment.

I do not think one needs to spend any more time at this stage except to say this. At the time the 1945 proposals were embarked on, we had only five years' experience with unemployment insurance. We now have that operative to the extent where its coverage has exceeded even the fondest dreams of those who advocated the measure and were responsible for its enactment in 1940. In addition to that we have supplementary benefits now representing 100 per cent of the value during the period of benefit of the unemployment insurance provisions themselves. These supplementary benefits cover, in the peak season in most recent years, almost 150,000 Canadian workers. Now, that represents a tremendous measure of public assistance. On top of that we now have the disability pension; on top

of that we now have an old age security program as a result of which 880,000 people of this country at age 70 and over, every month, are receiving without a means test assistance from the taxpayers of Canada. Through policies recommended by this parliament and this government, there is also the old age assistance program and the blindness allowance program. All these are measures which are very important and integral in the discussion that is before us.

I do not believe, therefore, I was in error last night in closing when I said that these measures, together with the proposal for hospital insurance, round out to a very complete degree a measure of responsible social welfare action in this country of which all of us in Canada can be proud.

Mr. Diefenbaker: Does the minister mean by that statement that this is the last one for this government?

Mr. Martin: No, my hon. friend did not hear what I said. I said that this government, by this particular measure, as well as the proposal for hospital insurance, has given an indication that it is the only group that will ever be in power able to do these very things.

Mr. Bell: May I ask the minister a question relating to the figures?

Mr. Martin: In committee.

Mr. Bell: Could he give those on a per capita basis, either now or in committee?

Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and the house went into committee thereon, Mr. Robinson (Simcoe East) in the chair.

On clause 1—*Short title.*

The Chairman: Shall this clause carry?

Mrs. Fairclough: No, Mr. Chairman. We were very happy to co-operate with the minister last evening and again today in trying to get this bill through the house for the reasons which he explained to us. But I would think if the minister wants to get this bill through the house, he jolly well had better quit making political speeches.

Mr. Pickersgill: It is only the opposition who can do that.

An hon. Member: More threats of obstruction.

Mrs. Fairclough: Talk about biting the hand that feeds you! We have gone along with this and we have purposely refrained from dragging out the discussion on the bill which, as has already been said—

Mr. Dickey: Why drag it out?