

Unemployment Insurance Act

and welfare plans do not mix with an insurance scheme. In making a broad revision of the act I hope the government will see to it that the unemployment insurance fund is returned to its original structure, namely an actuarial plan based on sound insurance principles.

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, I know there is a general desire to have this bill passed this afternoon and so I will be very brief. I think most hon. members were disappointed that at least a number of the recommendations of the Gill commission report are not being implemented at this time. As the previous speaker said, we hope this will be taken care of early next session. We have been promised it for years.

As other hon. members have said, the reason for our concern is that there is no piece of legislation at the federal level that has more "bugs", in it, if I may use the expression, than the Unemployment Insurance Act. The evils one could list are clear, to say the least. I do not wish to catalogue them this afternoon because I have done so on other occasions. I shall mention only one or two.

The first concerns the enforcement of the act in recent years and the virtual reign of terror conducted among the farmers of the country by the officials of the commission. Where people have employed independent contractors for two or three hours a week, officials of the commission have been running about trying to match the efforts of the income tax department of years ago, sometimes going back ten years to see what they can dig up merely because an employee is alleged to have worked for a couple of hours a week and was unaware of the fact that he had to fill out a form to be exempted.

I commend the officials of the commission for trying to do their duty. They are very much in the same position as policemen. But if every policeman in this country enforced the letter of every municipal by-law and every federal and provincial statute, 95 per cent of the people of Canada would be in police court every day. I think a little horse sense might be exercised by the officials of the commission.

One specific feature which has affected a great many members of this house has been the division made between manpower offices and unemployment insurance commission offices. In some parts of the country this division does not make much practical difference, but in areas such as southern Ontario, southern Quebec and the lower mainland of British

Columbia it makes a great deal of difference. Formerly every small industrial city, and here I speak of cities of 25,000 to 100,000 population, had their unemployment insurance commission office and manpower office in the same place. Then some persons got the idea that they would divide the departments administratively in government, and they carried this through by dividing them everywhere, at the lower level as well.

In my constituency there is an unemployment insurance office in London, Ontario, but no unemployment insurance office in St. Thomas, to serve Stratford, Brantford, Galt and other cities in between. People have not yet got used to this division. If they apply for unemployment insurance they assume that the manpower centre is automatically informed, but this is not the case in most instances.

I know that in changes like this there are administrative problems which will likely be worked out with the passage of time, but meanwhile most members of parliament, already heavily engaged, are given a vast amount of extra work. In the 15 years that I have been in this house I have had one or two complaints each year about the administration of the unemployment insurance fund, which speaks very well for the commission. But since the division of offices, with the removal of the unemployment insurance office from the local area, I have had six times as many complaints in three months about the administration of unemployment insurance as I had in the previous 15 years.

The government may say what it likes, and offer all the excuses it likes, but the fact of the matter is that the public is not being served. I do not know how many people who have encountered trouble have not written to me but, as I say, the number who have written me has increased. What may be required is more staff at the local level. Most people do not know how to fill out the necessary forms. This work may be easily done by members of parliament and civil servants who are accustomed to forms *ad nauseam*. We have learned by experience to make out forms, but if an individual is confused by a form he should have the assistance of someone at the local office to help him fill it out.

I have been able to clear up a great many of the complaints I have received, because they were due to misunderstandings. Only the other day I had two cases before an umpire, and one was a matter of misunderstanding. In the other the officials just would not change