

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

of those who enforce them, to a considerable extent make a farce under our present law of the meaning of unemployment insurance. It is very hard when a member of the House of Commons has his constituents, or the constituents of some other member come to him to discuss unemployment insurance. If my memory is correct it was in 1940 that we first established the principle of unemployment insurance.

**Mr. Nicholson:** 1941.

**Mr. Winch:** It is very hard for a member of this house when a constituent, who has been paying into the unemployment insurance fund since 1941, or for most of the years since 1941, who has reached the age of 65 or 67, but who is still able and willing to carry on, comes to him saying he has been told by the officials, not that he is not physically fit, not that he is not able, but that because of his years and his position, and there being nothing available in his occupation, he is not available for work. In effect they say, "We declare that you are not available." Although such a person may have paid into the fund since 1941, what does unemployment insurance mean to him and people like him? They are out.

While sitting here waiting for the opportunity to speak I could not help but think of what we read in the newspapers about the ovation given in the other place to Senator Roebuck on the occasion of his ninetieth birthday. I have no hesitation in saying, and I have said it before publicly, that he is one of the most able, one of the most brilliant, one of the most hard working members of the Senate. There is no question about that; but you know if he was to go by unemployment insurance regulations he would have been wiped out 30 years ago.

● (5:40 p.m.)

In principle this is what is going on today all across Canada. It makes me sick when I think of the number of cases which have come to my attention of men who are in the age bracket of 65 or 67, who are seeking employment after having been employed for many years and who are declared by the government office or agency to be not available. The matter of availability should be a decision for the worker, and not that of a bureaucrat in a government office. If a man is physically available and has paid his premiums he should be recognized as being available and as being entitled to unemployment insurance.

[Mr. Winch.]

The Minister of Labour (Mr. Nicholson) comes from Vancouver in the province of British Columbia. He knows that over the past few months we have had and are having now a serious unemployment situation.

**Mr. Nicholson:** Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the hon. member has heard the most recent figures. British Columbia is the one province in Canada in which unemployment is going down instead of up.

**Mr. Winch:** That is wonderful, but it does not change one iota what I am saying. We have had and have now a very serious unemployment situation in Vancouver and in the province of British Columbia. Yes, the figure may go down a part of one per cent, but I do not care whether it is 400,000, 300,000, 200,000 or 100,000—when a man is unemployed and his family is going hungry we have a problem; and this has been a big problem in British Columbia. The Minister of Labour knows that we have faced a critical situation in the last 12 months, particularly in the construction industry, the power industry and the shipbuilding industry. Sixty five per cent of the workers in the shipbuilding industry are now out of work in Victoria and Vancouver. Twenty two per cent of all the carpenters in Vancouver, Nanaimo, New Westminster and Victoria are unemployed right now. Those are the figures. Progress is being made in respect of the power dams on the Peace river and at Mica creek, but the federal government is so interested in Ottawa and Quebec that major construction work is going ahead there, while the only major construction in the city of Vancouver is not going ahead, under the instructions of this government.

I had to answer the interjection of the minister, because it is quite all right for the minister and me to be drawing our salaries, but those who are not eligible under certain regulations for unemployment insurance in British Columbia have quite a problem when they are faced with the matter of putting ham and eggs on the table and paying the rent. I know of many persons who have not been able to work more than five and a half months in the last 12 month period. Can they draw unemployment insurance? The answer is no. They are not eligible because they do not have six months stamps. I know that is the regulation. I was hoping it might be changed, because the man who has worked for only five and a half months and cannot find employment must provide for his family