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Thank you for your letter of 24 January about the benefits received by part-time members of the UDR who are otherwise unemployed. I regret that it has taken so long to reply.

I am naturally sympathetic to any proposal which might improve the position of these soldiers, and the possibility of special treatment for them has been looked at very closely. I am afraid, however, that there are substantial difficulties in the way of any change in the present rules.

As you know, the position is that a day is not treated as a day of unemployment if the claimant is employed and earns more than 75p for that day. It follows that for any day for which a UDR member gets normal service pay he is debarred from receiving unemployment benefit.

The only exceptions to this general rule are, as you mention in your letter, lifeboat-men and part-time firemen. But whereas lifeboat-men and part-time firemen may only be called out occasionally, in the event of specific, unforeseen incidents, part-time members of the UDR can, in the main, decide for themselves when and how often they should go on duty. Thus, if members of the UDR were to be given an unrestricted right to unemployment benefit the part-time UDR claimant's combined income from benefit and the enhanced UDR service which his unemployed status would enable him to perform could far exceed a normal wage. It would give the unemployed part-timer a potentially



significant advantage over full-time members of the Regiment. The same considerations do not apply to lifeboat-men and part-time firemen.

A concession for the UDR would inevitably lead to pressure for similar treatment from other groups of part-time workers, such as the part-time RUCR, the TA and those engaged in various other forms of community service. This might lead to a problem of parity with the rest of the United Kingdom. In addition it must be recognised that such exemptions would place an additional burden on other social security contributors both here and in Great Britain and would militate against the basic insurance principles on which the national insurance scheme is founded.

You also asked about the fluctuations in weekly income which can occur. It is of course here that supplementary benefit can help and, as Mr McClure explained to you, [redacted] has been receiving this. The important point is that in any week when [redacted] does not receive a full week's unemployment benefit he may receive some supplementary benefit if his income would fall below the supplementary benefit level. As you know, in calculating entitlement to supplementary benefit £2 a week of part-time earnings is at present disregarded. The Government proposes to increase this figure to £4 from November next and, if accepted, this will at least provide a little extra financial help.

I am sorry not to be able to give you a more helpful reply but I am sure you will recognise that there are genuine difficulties about manipulating the social security system to the benefit of particular groups, no matter how deserving they may be.

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