

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971 (No. 2)

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I thank the hon. member very much. He has raised a whole new point that I could discuss.

Some hon. Members: No, no, no!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I do not believe, first of all, that I was throwing dirt on his colleagues.

Mr. Nystrom: Shame!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I do not care if his colleagues support us. That is not the issue. I was not throwing dirt on his colleagues. What I was saying to his colleagues was that the responsibility for the present economic situation and its continuation lies on the backs of those Members of Parliament who support publicly the government's economic policy.

Now, they may talk about it in caucus; I am sure they do. They may talk about it at home; I am sure they do. But the time has come for them to speak out about it in Parliament, because that is the way you get governments to move.

Mr. Nystrom: Right on!

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): That is the way you get governments, including the government House leader, to pay attention to Parliament—because they have to pay attention to Parliament. I hope that those proposals that are brought forth by the government for parliamentary reform go a lot further than just making it convenient for Members of Parliament. What needs to happen here is to create a system where Members of Parliament who represent ordinary people have an opportunity to speak out and to investigate, to be healthy skeptics of what government tells us they are going to do. Unfortunately, what has happened to this Parliament—and the government House leader is admitting this finally—is that Parliament has come more and more under the thumb of the executive.

That is what has happened to this institution. I wager that if we had a half decent budget process in place and there had been a good recommendation hanging around since 1977, we would never have had the budget we got on November 12. There is too much good sense in this House of Commons. There is not much good sense in the Department of Finance, not much good sense with the deputy minister of finance, not much good sense with the Minister of Finance. Putting that deputy minister together with the Minister of Finance, with the two of them never having met a payroll in their life, has been a combination that has been lethal to the country. That is the problem. We have never had that kind of thing before.

If this parliamentary reform program will allow Members of Parliament—I do not care what their stripe may be, Liberal, Conservative, New Democrat, or Independent even—to make some contribution to policy development, then the minister will have done something. But I warn him that if his program—I have not seen it yet—is merely designed to meet the convenience of Members of Parliament, then it is not enough, and it will be judged to be not enough by the country or by any interested observer in this place. Because the country is looking

at this place. They are looking at it, the government House leader knows it, and they are going to demand some things of this place. We have the responsibility—I am prepared to accept that, but so has the government—in terms of making it relevant. I hope, I pray, that he is enlightened, that he went far beyond his speech to the federal lawyers' club, which was a speech on the cosmetics of parliamentary reform rather than the reality of parliamentary reform to get to the heart of things. My position paper, which he referred to, was not the last word. The problem with the situation is that my position paper was the first word ever heard from a government in a long time about meaningful changes.

Members of Parliament would be a little better off even to take what he describes as those shallow reforms. If they were so shallow, why were they not adopted by the government immediately?

Mr. Pinard: Mr. Speaker, I hate to interrupt my hon. colleague. I respect the fact that he has the floor and I would not object if he is given a bit more time, if he requires it. However, I think he is on the wrong track. He presumes I will impose on the committee changes just as he tried to do. The reference will be very broad, and the committee will be large in order to allow as many backbenchers as possible to participate. I hope the hon. member will refrain from participating because I would not like to see the old pros giving their views on this; I would like to hear new and good views from backbenchers.

• (1450)

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, that is a rare and refreshing observation. It is not a point of order although it was raised under the guise of a point of order. In any event, we will see what the proposal is. I never look a gift horse in the mouth, but I have a healthy skepticism about what this government tells me it is giving to me. Any time the government gives me a gift, I worry. Sometimes it flares back and kicks me where I am very tender. We will see if that occurs. If my friend's proposals are good, if there is some reasonableness, if he will allow backbenchers and if he does not chair the committee—

Mr. Pinard: I won't.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton):—then there may be some hope. I hope it does not die with this Parliament, though, because the problems will be around until the fall and we will have to deal with them.

I hope my friend does not put his thumb under this. When we get to the moment of truth with respect to parliamentary reform, I hope what happened with respect to freedom of information will not happen again. When we got to the moment of truth with respect to freedom of information the government started to quiver and shake. The government said, "My goodness, we are going to have to give up some secrets; we can't have that." However, I will give my friend his due. If it is a good approach and if the committee system is good, he