

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): The hon. member also moves motion No. 17 as follows:

That Bill C-229, an act respecting unemployment insurance in Canada, be amended by deleting from subclause 1 of clause 143, in line 9 at page 93, the words "the minister deems advisable" and substituting the words "may reasonably be necessary for the purpose of this part, and"

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, these are not significant amendments but they try to make the bill more presentable and get away from the arbitrary decisions that may have to be made by ministers involved—in this case I believe it is the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Lang). Clause 140 (2) (a) provides:

The minister shall collect information concerning employment for workers and workers seeking employment and, to the extent the minister considers necessary,—

This is the part that we find offensive and arbitrary. It is left to the decision of the minister. In the amendment, the power of the minister to make a subjective evaluation as to when he will release information is deleted and the reasonably judicial test is substituted. If the government cannot go along with what I am suggesting, I hope they can give me reasons. I do not think I have to pursue this matter any further except to reiterate that the provision, "to the extent the minister considers necessary" should instead read, "to the extent reasonably necessary," which takes it away from the minister alone.

Mr. Stan Schumacher (Palliser): If I could speak in support of this motion, Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) is too modest when he refers to the proposed amendment as being somewhat insignificant. In many instances this Parliament delegates far too much authority to individual ministers of the Crown or to the executive branch in general. I think it has to be taken as a practical situation that the minister will probably never be the one to make the decision; it will be made by an administrator on his behalf.

Mr. Pepin: That is just hearsay.

Mr. Schumacher: The Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce (Mr. Pepin) says that is just hearsay, but maybe he will be prepared to prove that statement by evidence. He probably will not attempt to do it at this time and it is unlikely that a convenient time will ever arise.

I am sure we have confidence in the present minister, but the fact is that ministers are not permanent and this legislation in all likelihood will stay on the statute books for many years. I suppose the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce intervened because this question deals with the collection of information. He is closely connected with the current census which is causing so much dissatisfaction among certain segments of the population, so he is probably somewhat sensitive on the subject.

In my view, the question of privacy arises here. All governments have a penchant for collecting information. They do this with the best intentions in the world, but in

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many cases never use it and it just turns into a "make work" project. I suggest that any legislation along these lines should be based on the criteria of what is reasonably necessary. A great number of businessmen, small farmers and small businessmen in this country feel they are being driven to the wall by having to make voluminous returns to the government. Sometimes an examination of the questionnaire does not indicate what they are looking for. So I think a determined stand should be taken at every opportunity against this type of legislation which makes it easy for large staffs to be built up in departments for the collection of information even when there is no requirement or need for that information.

• (3:20 p.m.)

It is just not good enough to say, "where the minister considers it necessary". I think there will be further empire building if this legislation is passed. Empires are still being built. It is too bad that the government cannot institute more austerity programs. On the other hand, of course, our last austerity program did not have a great effect on empires built around the city and in federal government offices across the country.

Certainly, there has been no let-up in increasing the size of our bureaucracy. Bigger bureaucracy has led to increasing demands on bill payers in this country, the people who are trying to make a living, trying to make businesses grow and create jobs for other people. There has been a growing tide of demand on these people to meet administrative expenses which are really not justified nor necessary. I strongly urge the acceptance of this fine and important amendment moved by the hon. member for Hamilton West.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, if a vote is called on these two motions I shall probably vote for them, but I trust my friends will forgive me if I say I cannot get excited about the issue either way. May I abbreviate what is in the bill. It says that the minister shall collect certain information and, to the extent the minister considers necessary, he may make it available. The amendment would have the bill read—again I abbreviate—that the minister shall collect certain information and, to the extent reasonably necessary, make it available. Is there really any difference?

Perhaps my hon. friend will take me behind the curtain and point out to me just who is to decide, in the second case, what is "reasonably necessary". Surely, in the end it will be the minister who decides. I think the wording, as my hon. friend has suggested it, is less offensive. As I say, if there is a vote I shall probably support the amendment, but I do not think it is all that important.

Mr. Gordon Ritchie (Dauphin): Mr. Speaker, I should like to speak for a few minutes in defence of the amendment moved by the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander). Perhaps because I live in a relatively small community with a Manpower office I can see events happening that hon. members who live in larger, more impersonal areas may not see. About 9,000 people live in