

Employment and Immigration

put pressure on the minister and indicated that they would stall the bill or vote against it if he did not retreat from the position he had taken. In the same way the official opposition was split. There were many Conservatives from eastern Canada, although we did not see much of them in committee.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I do not mind the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) rehashing the same old nonsense that I have been hearing since 1971, but at that time the NDP opposed an amendment that we moved raising the qualifying period from eight to 12 weeks. I do not mind this old hash about my right-wing philosophy, but what I do mind is when he refers to the activities of members of the standing committee. He most unfairly directs his attention to members who in one way or another have raised their concerns about this whole bill. The hon. member himself did not play such a great role in committee; he was absent many times and I had to bail him out on several occasions. He has no business referring to the activities of members of committees. I hope the hon. member sticks to his usual useless rhetoric and—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member's comment could have been made in seeking the floor in due time. The Chair cannot prevent the hon. member who has the floor referring to debates or to procedures in committee after the committee has reported to the House. That is his privilege, as it is the privilege of other members. At the same time, if the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) has a different opinion, he can speak after the hon. member has spoken and express his own view.

Mr. Rodriguez: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will continue where I left off. The hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) trumpeted what a great thing he had done in getting the minimum attachment period increased. He is so busy patting himself on the back that he will break his wrist. He did a great job. But when the trade unions were before the committee, was he ever quiet on the subject of the minimum attachment period! The UAW took a very firm stand in opposition to it, and so did the CLC. I did not hear great arguments put forward by the critic from the official opposition party on the Manpower committee. I did not hear him saying that it was a disincentive. I did not hear the Conservative party support the tightening up of the qualifying period.

Mr. Paproski: You were not there that day; or if you were, you did not hear.

Mr. Rodriguez: The hon. member for Edmonton West—

Mr. Paproski: Edmonton Centre.

Mr. Rodriguez: Edmonton Centre (Mr. Paproski)—is playing right end. I did not see him in committee. When this question of changing or tampering with the minimum attachment period came before the committee, the government received a great deal of flak from backbench Liberals from Atlantic Canada. Those in the official opposition from Atlantic Canada, with one or two exceptions, were absent from

[Mr. Rodriguez.]

committee when this matter was dealt with. The Conservatives were split, as well.

The witnesses who appeared before the committee, especially the trade unions, time and again suggested that the government ought to focus its attention on unemployment in Canada instead of tampering with the minimum attachment period. Just to show the House how the resultant political decision was made, the minister trotted in a regional breakdown. There were to be 54 regions across the country, and then there were to be rates of unemployment with participating weeks of employment attached to those rates in order to qualify for unemployment insurance benefits. It is a bureaucrat's dream. They all have jobs now. This scheme was trotted into the committee ill-prepared, ill-defined, and when we started asking questions as to how it would work we found that they had very little idea how it would operate.

Certainly, the minister cannot stand in this House and tell us that this program is well thought-out. The information on which it was claimed that the minimum attachment period was a disincentive was based on the comprehensive review of the unemployment insurance program in Canada. We had one such example of narrative reports which went into the comprehensive review of unemployment insurance in Canada. That one referred to employment patterns in the Atlantic provinces. The studies, the reports and the data collected were all done by the Unemployment Insurance Commission and a few consultants that they retained for that purpose. They were probably paid excellent salaries to do that. I do not know why they feel they have to undertake solving the unemployment problem in this country themselves.

• (1220)

They referred to personal interviews. The whole study was an internal study done by the Unemployment Insurance Commission. On the basis of that study, a proposal was brought forward indicating a change from eight to 12 weeks which was to reflect the regional rate of unemployment. We have disagreed with that method of establishing the minor attachment period within the Unemployment Insurance Act. If that is what is going to be done, then the premiums paid by people participating in the unemployment insurance program ought to reflect the risk of their becoming unemployed. At that point the entire thing becomes a jungle. In Calgary, where the unemployment rate is low, the rate someone pays in premiums ought to reflect the risk of his becoming unemployed and collecting from the program. If you accept the premise of going to a regional rate of unemployment, persons in areas of high unemployment will participate at a lower rate in terms of number of weeks to collect benefits, and it ought to work the other way with respect to premiums.

I should like to read into this debate some of the comments from the groups who appeared before the committee. For example, I am referring to the United Auto Workers who appeared and said the following:

We want jobs; we need jobs; the right to a job should be as basic as any civil rights (if not more so). The failure of the government and our social system to guarantee this right forces us to depend on unemployment insurance. The