

of living. My friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, was concerned about pensions and rising prices. This was their being. I was impressed with that gentlemanly crowd—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander:—until they wanted to get married. Then things happened. I don't know how it could have happened. I do not know how anyone could sell their principles for political expediency. This party brought a motion that pinpointed the problems of our nation because the government was not dealing with unemployment, rising costs and inflation. Guess who voted against it? I do not want to mention any names, but just look to my left.

I listened to the Minister of Justice give us a great lesson on the interpretation of section 23 of the Financial Administration Act. He went through a whole lot of things. He was very concerned. He said that payment was required to meet the just and legal claims of those who were entitled to benefit. Let me say this: we on this side are equally concerned about that. We are equally concerned—

Mr. Orlikow: Tell us.

Mr. Alexander: There's another one. I understand that member is going to be speaking next. He will tell us all about it. We are just as concerned. Let the record show that in no way will this party hold up payments to those who are legally entitled to them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Andras: You just don't sign the cheques, that is all.

Mr. Alexander: The minister is getting involved. I say to the minister that when we give our word he can rest assured that it is final.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: It is not like the night we had a gentleman's agreement here. We were not supposed to have a recorded vote. Guess who turned out to be the bad fellows? After a little conversation on the opposite side, they forced a vote. What I am saying is, I do not know whether we can trust them.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander: I do not see anyone standing up on a question of privilege. If they do, we will talk all night about that.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): What is the point you are trying to make?

Mr. Alexander: Now we hear from the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. He is always talking. This is my first opportunity to put my thoughts on the record and I am being interrupted unduly and in an ungentlemanly fashion. I cannot understand it.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mr. Alexander: I have made my point. We say they will get their money in due time, but in the meantime this government must be chastised, criticized and put in its place. That is the role of the opposition, constructive criticism. In no way will we abdicate that responsibility.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: In trying to interpret this section, the Minister of Justice referred to section 137(4) which relates to the limit. I will read it for the edification of hon. members:

The total amount outstanding at any time of advances made under this section shall not exceed \$800 million.

We have had a legal opinion on this, Mr. Speaker. That is not final. What this House debated in 1971 does not mean a thing. The minister said we can forget about it. He then said the law is the law in terms of section 23 of the Financial Administration Act. He interpreted it his way, we interpreted it our way. I say this is why we have judges and courts. There is no way I will ever accept any legal opinion coming from a minister, with all due respect to him as a law professor and Member of Parliament, because I saw the grain stabilization program in force at one time. They had a legal opinion then, but they backed away from that.

The minister interpreted the law and so did the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. Parliament is paramount when it decides on a statutory limit. That is the law. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre leaves the law to Mr. Speaker. I must say this, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is certainly well versed in the intricacies of the rules, regulations and laws of the House of Commons. I think that he deserves a hand in that regard.

• (2040)

The hon. member says there is one law that says we must pay the benefits. I say that he is quite correct. However, I also say that there is another law which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has conveniently forgotten, and that is the law which says that the figure shall not exceed \$800 million. This is the limit that was set by parliament. When it comes to deciding which is the more urgent of the two, I respectfully submit that parliament stands ahead. The money will be acquired but not in a devious, clandestine way, not in an illegal way such as was perpetrated by this government. I think that both have to be read together.

An hon. Member: Which law are you in favour of?

Mr. Alexander: Again there is the same noise in the background. I think the prerogative and the integrity of parliament must be maintained. I say that parliament is paramount. I say that parliament has not only the right but the obligation to control spending. In every instance parliament must have some means whereby its approval is sought with respect to spending. In other words, we must have some interest in the purse-strings.

That is what happened in 1971. The government believed in all those principles which I enunciated with respect to the prerogative and integrity of parliament;