

debate that he has not followed as attentively as those who sat in committee, but I cannot help wanting to add a word or two. I would put them in the form of a question and perhaps the minister could respond next time he intervenes.

The point made by my friend, the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), is born out of concern that we seem to be licensing unlawful activities. We all know that this country has a cadre of habitual criminals. It would seem that if this particular clause were accepted, a habitual criminal could establish his benefit rights and then for some reason find himself in jail. He can establish his right to benefits, be in jail for the winter, warm and comfortable, and pop out when there is no job opportunity in his trade classification or general work area. When such opportunity does become available, he could again provoke police authority and end up back in jail. Indeed, by wilful decision he could spread this over two or three years.

● (1730)

Mr. Alexander: Only up to two years.

Mr. Forrestall: Two years. If it is in fact suspended, you could have a new benefit period and supplementary period extending over three calendar years without any difficulty at all. This is not just a technicality. Anyone familiar with the comings and goings in our magistrates courts could, on the basis of their experience, find situations where this could occur. Should something like that occur it would be a travesty of justice, which is the point made by the hon. member for Hamilton West.

[Translation]

Mr. Charles-Eugène Dionne (Kamouraska): Mr. Speaker, my remarks will be very short; however, I rise to say that I support the amendment moved by the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), because I do not think it is normal to find in one piece of legislation provisions which deprive senior citizens of benefits, and other provisions which encourage those who were convicted. So, if I understand the law correctly, somebody who has been in prison for, say, two, three or four months, and who has already contributed to the unemployment insurance program, would be eligible for benefits when he gets out of prison. I do not see anything in the bill which could prevent it. That means, therefore, that the law would protect criminals who have been sentenced to more than a year, that is 52 weeks. That is going a little too far. I do not really agree with that clause of the bill. I am willing to try to help those people by all means of rehabilitation possible, to try and find ways of giving them jobs. But, now we are encouraging them. The previous speaker said that there are people who manage to stay in a warm place during the winter and work for a few weeks—eight at least—to be eligible for benefits. Therefore, I support the amendment moved by the hon. member for Hamilton West.

[English]

Hon. Robert K. Andras (Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I listened with considerable interest to the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) and other members on this proposed amendment.

Unemployment Insurance Act

Somebody in an aside comment stated that the hon. member for Hamilton West was thinking of a filibuster. I do not think this is so. He is, of course, often full of bluster. Perhaps that is what was meant by the aside. Anyway he and I have had various exchanges of this sort.

I can defend the basic amendment in Bill C-69. I think it is probably a bit opportunistic to make the comparison he made about restoring this provision, as was pointed out by the hon. member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez), that was in the previous act. That comparison to the other amendment we were debating a few minutes ago is odious, not relevant, and a bit politically opportunistic. In fact I wonder if that was not the reason for the attack on this particular amendment in Bill C-69.

As the hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) indicated a few minutes ago, in the debate of several years ago when this matter came up, it was supported in almost every corner of the House, certainly in the corner occupied by the hon. member for Hamilton West and his colleagues.

There has been very considerable representation over the past two or three years, since the amendments of 1971, by provincial governments and many other organizations concerned about them. We are not rewarding crime. We are not making it pay off by any stretch of the imagination. We are simply saying that people who run afoul of the law after having earned unemployment insurance entitlement through legitimate work activity were, under the amendments of 1971, when the clock started ticking from the time they were incarcerated, losing their entitlement even though that incarceration might have been for a short-term sentence. We are simply providing 104 weeks in which that entitlement can be maintained. When they come out of incarceration they have to answer to all of the obligations under the act such as a job search, willingness to accept suitable work, and so on.

The amendment proposed in Bill C-69 is a decent amendment. It does not in any way encourage crime. It simply restores a position long established and accidentally left out of the 1971 amendments.

I would ask for the support of hon. members in denying the amendment of the hon. member for Hamilton West and leaving as is the amendment in Bill C-69.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: Question.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. Members: Yea.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. Members: Nay.