

Senator Frith: Dismantling it is what they are doing.

Senator MacEachen: We are basically altering a fundamental element of the Canadian social contract—and we are asked to pass it and then, after we pass it, to study it.

Senator Perrault: Unbelievable!

Senator MacEachen: I find that unacceptable. We will continue to study and to do our work as quickly as possible, but we are also going to do everything possible to ensure that the Canadian people understand what is happening regarding the implications of this bill and to ensure that the extra burdens that will be placed on the unemployed will be on the conscience of the Canadian people. They are not going to escape through ignorance, and they should not be allowed to escape through ignorance, much as that seems to be the strategy. Why should we not examine in some detail whether the removal of government support is not a prelude to a further erosion of the unemployment insurance system?

I had a letter from an important citizen in Nova Scotia, who said that the government is withdrawing its support. It ceases then to become a social insurance system, because society, as a whole, is not participating in the program any longer. It is financed solely by employers and employees. That is the American system.

When I was a graduate student at the University of Chicago, I learned the differences between the Canadian system and the American system. They have experience-rating there, wherein the better your employment performance the less you pay in premiums. Will that mean that we will have a system of experience-rating advocated in Canada under which employers will leave areas of high unemployment to settle in the strong economic areas in order to have a better experience-rating? I fear that as a possibility, and I think it ought to be examined.

Honourable senators, I do not think I can support this motion. I hope the committee will do its work and examine the implications as carefully as possible and return to the Senate as quickly as possible. If it has proposals to make to us, we ought to consider them and carry on from there. In the meantime, the Senate will have to take responsibility for its conduct. We are not attempting to shirk our responsibility. The Canadian people will see on television today—it will be on the screen all night—that the Conservative Party in the House of Commons denied benefits to the unemployed Canadians who will be coming on stream in January, benefits to which they ought to be entitled—not the Senate, but the Conservatives on the other side.

Some Hon. Senators: Hear, hear!

● (1800)

Senator Flynn: Honourable senators—

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, I wish to inform the Senate that if Senator Flynn speaks now, his speech will have the effect of closing the debate on the motion.

[Translation]

Senator Flynn: Honourable senators, I just want to say a few words.

[Senator MacEachen.]

I believe it is unfortunate that Senator MacEachen could not appear on television to deliver his speech tonight because he was in top form and he appealed to every possible sentiment.

I would not say his arguments had a demagogic slant, but it was close enough. It was quite impressive. He did manage to impress some of the senators sitting around him, but I would say he did not impress me—

Hon. Joseph-Philippe Guay: That is understandable.

Senator Flynn: —because, for one thing, the bill has been in the Senate for over a month. Some of its provisions have been considered and Senator MacEachen quoted various opinions. Surely the Senate could have formed an opinion.

Second, Senator MacEachen has failed to show how the Senate could amend the financial clauses of this bill.

Senator Guay: The committee will do its work.

Senator Flynn: Even less than the Senate.

Dear Senator Guay, if the Senate cannot do something a committee is even less capable of doing it.

You should understand that, you have been here long enough not to utter such stupidities.

Senator Guay: You are not saying anything, only stupidities.

Senator Flynn: You make a lot of noise but not much sense.

[English]

Hon. H.A. Olson: You study the bill first.

Senator Flynn: Yes, you study it—I am sure you know it by heart. You usually know everything about everything. This is the first time I have seen you pleading ignorance.

[Translation]

I do not want to extend the debate. First I just want to point out that Senator MacEachen has not shown us how the Senate or the special committee could amend the provisions of this bill which have a financial impact.

Secondly, when he says that, by agreeing to this motion, we would prevent people from stating their views, it is not true at all since it gives the committee the authority to continue to hear witnesses, their grievances and their complaints. The committee will be allowed to table a report.

Senator Guay: After the bill has been passed.

Senator Flynn: That is all the committee can do in any case. Anything else is just an emotional and unreasonable plea under the circumstances, with a view to playing politics at this stage.

I find it extremely unfortunate that the majority on the other side of this chamber has not taken this opportunity to find a solution to the problems faced by people who expect some benefits from Bill C-21.

[English]

The Hon. the Speaker: Honourable senators, it was moved by Senator Flynn, P.C., seconded by Senator Roblin, P.C.: