

Unemployment Insurance Act

this government when it said that under the worst circumstances you could think of, taking into account all variables, the most this government would need to pay under the scheme was \$800 million. And what are we talking about now? We are contemplating nearly \$2 billion—an astronomical figure compared with the one presented to us in 1971. Yet the former minister said, "It is only a drop in the bucket." Can you beat that—only a drop in the bucket? He was talking about the taxpayers' money. That was what the election was all about. My friends across the aisle know that, too. The bucket is only so deep. Unfortunately, all the taxpayers own that bucket and the bucket is only so deep. Therefore, what do we have here? Because of gross miscalculation and astonishing ignorance, the government has introduced this infamous Bill C-124.

An hon. Member: Tut, tut!

Mr. Alexander: I hear somebody saying, "Tut, tut!" I appreciate the moderation of his language.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): And there is no French translation.

Mr. Alexander: As a result of gross miscalculation and gross ignorance, the government has introduced this bill to the detriment of the employer and employee.

Mr. Stanfield: And the taxpayer.

Mr. Alexander: They will all be penalized, yes. That is what Bill C-124 is all about. This government is now looking for a blank cheque.

Mr. Stanfield: It is looking for absolution.

Mr. Alexander: It is looking for a blank cheque.

Mr. Stanfield: Absolution is what they are looking for.

Mr. Alexander: My leader says they are looking for absolution. I think they are also looking for a blank cheque. Why, Mr. Speaker? I ask that question because it is so difficult to support this bill in view of all the government told the committee and the House of Commons.

Mr. Benjamin: Well, are you going to support it or not?

Mr. Alexander: All the people of Canada know the government is asking them for a blank cheque. Let me read something the minister said by way of a press release dated January 17, 1973. The Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) was putting forward his reasons for wanting a blank cheque. The press release reads: Such a ceiling is unrealistic in the light of constantly-changing and unpredictable factors as the national and regional unemployment rates, constantly changing average earnings, and the growth of the labour force which make such a ceiling impractical.

So what else is new? They knew this back in 1971. The same conditions existed then as exist now. We had the same ever-changing and unpredictable factors; we had the same national and regional unemployment rates and the same sort of average earnings; there was the same sort of growth rate in the work force. They knew all that before. Notwithstanding that, they said we still had to have a ceiling.

[Mr. Alexander.]

• (2030)

Now, what has changed? No different criteria now exist; the criteria that existed then exist now. At one time the government said we would have a ceiling notwithstanding all these variables. Now there has been a complete flip-flop and they say that because of the variables we cannot have a ceiling.

The government must be credible. I do not know what they do in caucus, but when they come out of caucus into the House of Commons and become involved with the people they have to be credible. This is why I question what they are doing. The minister says that committee members, members of the House and others do not have to worry about that because there are sufficient controls. I again quote from his press release of January 17:

There are sufficient controls, through annual reports, Auditor General reports and public accounts to ensure an adequate review of the financial operation of the program.

Cutting away all the verbiage, what the minister is saying there is, "After everything has happened you can look at it and tell us whether you like it." That is what he is asking us to do. Is this right? Is this why we are here? The government has set a precedent with regard to controls which require parliamentary approval. I do not know the reason. Perhaps if you knew this thing was such a mish-mash you would say, "Fool them all and throw in a figure, because with the figure we really have this bill will never pass." They threw in that figure hoping to dupe the people into accepting it. Then when you find you cannot dupe them any longer you say, "Wipe it out, repeal the section and give us a blank cheque."

The Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang) gave us a marvellous lesson today on sections 23 and 28 of the Financial Administration Act. He showed how we can move into areas when we have a ceiling that we can hide or bypass and forget all about the House of Commons.

An hon. Member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander: You will get your chance to speak, friend, if you have the nerve to stand up and speak, but don't continually bug me. I am trying to make a worth while contribution.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: He is still my friend. He is an interesting type of person.

An hon. Member: Part of the coalition government.

Mr. Alexander: Yes, he is part of that group that wooed another, went through the courtship and entered into marriage. In the past week and a half we have seen how the marriage has been finally consummated—cementlike: they could not budge. I have watched them playing hanky-panky with one another.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Alexander: This is interesting because I watched that same gang on my left, with all due respect, in the last parliament when they were concerned about the problems of the nation in terms of high unemployment and the cost