

Unemployment Insurance Act

nour with which it has faced us and the Canadian people over this issue.

I came in here about two weeks ago, Mr. Speaker, fresh from conversations with my colleagues, convinced that I should vote against this bill. But then I confess to you, Sir, that I wavered; I was tempted. I listened to the hon. member for Verdun (Mr. Mackasey). We all know him to be a compassionate man. We know him to be a very warm-hearted man with a deep, abiding and sincere concern for those less fortunate than himself. Beyond that, Mr. Speaker, he is a very persuasive speaker. As I sat here the old silver-tongued devil from Verdun took me up on the mountain top and showed me all that lay below. And I was tempted.

• (2010)

I said to my colleagues, "Having listened to the hon. member for Verdun, the man who was the responsible minister before he was turfed out by his colleagues for his humanitarianism, I cannot see my way clear to vote against the bill." They said, "Vote against it. It will go to committee and there you will get a chance to find out everything you need to know about it." So I did: hanging my head as I rose in my place, I voted against the bill. I felt badly at the time but I took the advice of those with more experience than I have, and the bill went to committee.

Then, Mr. Speaker, the whole sordid story was spread before us, the whole tatty tale of how this government deliberately deceived the people of this country about the true story of unemployment just before the election campaign. This was unemployment which they had created deliberately and for which they probably took credit at the time. It became clear to me then how they were trying to cover up a course of action which one of the most responsible men in this country, the Auditor General, has said is of dubious legality and is unique in parliamentary history as far as his research carries him. This is a uniqueness so striking that he has asked for separate legal opinion on whether the government's course of action was legal.

The former minister, the hon. member from Verdun—I wish he had been here about five minutes earlier when I honoured and eulogized him—

Mr. Roy (Timmins): With knives in the back.

Mr. Reilly: The hon. member talks about knives in the back. That is a marvellous thing to hear from a Liberal in reference to the hon. member for Verdun.

Some hon. Members: Shame!

Mr. Reilly: If I had hired as a straight man the hon. member who interjected, Mr. Speaker, I would sign the cheque right now because he has done the job for the week. But there is more to come.

I want to take hon. members back along memory lane to 1969, when this whole sorry mess began, and to bring them up to date on what has happened since. There has been an attempt by members of the government—the chief among them and the most eloquent, certainly, has been the hon. member for Verdun—to persuade people

that because we in this party have stood from the beginning against a course of action that is clearly illegal, clearly fraudulent, clearly evasive, we are somehow arrayed in all our power against the poor, the unfortunate and the helpless.

If anyone on that side of the House has any doubt about where we stand, or if any of my easily pleased, well-heeled friends at the other end of the House have any doubts about where we stand, let them bring in an appropriation now for the money we need, and we will pass it in all three stages tonight. They will not do that, of course, Mr. Speaker, because that would be admitting that they were wrong—they were wrong when they began, they were wrong throughout and they are wrong now. And to admit to being capable of error is something that the Liberals never do. I repeat, in case there were some hon. members like the straight man who may not have heard me the first time, bring in an appropriation and it will pass in all three stages.

Mr. Baldwin: As long as they do not have computers to tell us how much.

Mr. Reilly: I want to go back to 1969 when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) told reporters hovering around him with microphones and pencils and pads at the round that he had discovered the enemy of our society, inflation, and that the old people, the poor people, the people on fixed incomes and on pensions and all the others he held dear—all those people were suffering and he proposed to do something about it. In the same year he was warned by the Economic Council of Canada that if he pursued the course which he announced he was going to pursue, two things were likely to happen. First, there would be higher unemployment than that which we were already experiencing—and that was not a happy state of affairs in 1969—and, second, that inflation likely would not be halted at all. Despite that, he pursued his course and said that he did not care that unemployment went as high as 6 per cent. He said that to newspapermen and on television, Mr. Speaker.

Upon reflection, I have to conclude that it is a good thing that the Prime Minister was not scared of the figure of 6 per cent. If he had been, he would have spent a good part of the next couple of years hiding in the cupboard or under the desk because we have had 6 per cent unemployment for most of that time.

We all know how much it concerned him when the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan) persistently sought day after day to find out if this bankrupt government had any plans to cope with the unemployment which it had created. We know what the Prime Minister mouthed across the House of Commons at the hon. member. We know what he told a group of unemployed workers in front of this House, Mr. Speaker. I will not repeat the words. I can only say that Marie Antoinette extended roughly the same invitation to the disgruntled masses in her time. She was a little more eloquent than the Prime Minister, but the effect was the same.

Moving on to 1970 and 1971, unemployment did reach 6 per cent, then went higher. Half a million Canadians were out of work. But still this government forged ahead. We heard at that time that inflation was licked. I remember

[Mr. Reilly.]