

Unemployment Insurance Act

wanted to help these workers, or the working classes of this country, this minimum period of 15 weeks should have been reduced to 10 weeks, or even to 8 weeks.

Mr. Starr: Does not the hon. member realize that following the course he suggests would impose a further drain on the fund? Is he advocating that? If so, why is he not prepared to pass this bill which would allow contributions to be increased in order that it might be possible for the workers to receive the benefits?

Mr. Robichaud: During the Liberal administration—

Some hon. Members: Answer the question.

Mr. Robichaud: Yes. I will tell the minister that during the Liberal administration a 15 week minimum was logical, because anyone who wanted to obtain work could do so.

Mr. Starr: That does not answer the question. But does not the hon. member recall that this government changed the formula so that people could get extra benefits, and seasonal benefits, and that this government provided an extension of two additional months, and—something which the former government refused to allow—

Some hon. Members: Order.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): A point of order, Mr. Chairman. The Minister of Labour, without even seeking to ask a question, now tries to interrupt in a great speech.

Mr. Starr: That was not a point of order, anyway.

The Deputy Chairman: All a member can do is ask whether whoever has the floor will permit a question. Then he may ask the question, but only if he has consent.

Mr. Fleming (Eglinton): The hon. member for Gloucester yielded the floor to the minister.

Mr. Robichaud: The Minister of Labour has admitted that under the present administration conditions were so bad that changes had to be made in the insurance regulations. I wish to repeat that in my constituency a large number of people cannot obtain the minimum of 15 weeks of employment that is required in order to qualify for benefits. Therefore I cannot agree with those members on the government side who are accusing us of preventing the passage of a bill which would provide benefits to the workers of this country.

(Translation):

Mr. Racine: Mr. Chairman, I had not intended to take part in the discussion of this

bill, and I think that the remarks of the hon. member for Essex East (Mr. Martin), certainly are not worth commenting upon, because, as usual the former minister of national health and welfare merely dealt with the matter of protection for the workers of this country.

However, this bill is meant to increase contributions made by employees and employers to the unemployment insurance fund, because the government wants to replenish this fund which is being rapidly depleted. If the fund is dwindling so fast, it is merely because there is so much unemployment in this country, and because more is being paid out in benefits than is being paid into the fund.

According to recent figures of the unemployment insurance commission, this bill would increase the contributions of both employees and employers from 25 to 56 per cent.

I do not wish to repeat here what has already been established during the debate, or refer to the disappointment felt over this bill throughout the country. We only have to refer to statements made by the board of trade of metropolitan Toronto, the Canadian Manufacturers' Association, the Canadian Congress of Labour and the Canadian Construction Association. Nor do I want to refer again to what has already been established about the present status of the fund, or to the fact that, if there is unemployment next fall and next winter, the commission would have to sell its securities and incur a loss of \$72 million.

However, I noted that the Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr) has specifically commissioned the hon. member for St. Hyacinthe-Bagot (Mr. Ricard) to defend the bill, and that is what I would like to touch upon.

Mr. Ricard: I was not commissioned by anyone. I said what I personally thought.

Mr. Caron: That is why it was so poorly said.

Mr. Racine: The hon. member for St. Hyacinthe-Bagot insists on pointing out that the views he expressed were his own. Indeed they must have been; they surely were not those of labour.

Mr. Chairman, allow me to quote from an article by the parliamentary correspondent of *Le Devoir* which certainly cannot be described as a Liberal paper. It stated on Wednesday June 17, that out of 585,489 persons registered with the national em-