

Unemployment Assistance

house and within a minute it will be declared the law of the land. Why this hurry?

Another mistake I think the minister has made is that at the resolution stage, in connection with a matter such as this, the discussion should have been much more extensive. I think that is where a mistake was made with regard to this particular bill. The minister, in answer to questions on the orders of the day, frequently makes longer statements than he made on introducing this resolution. Why did he not refer the house to the papers that were filed here on January 11 and the draft agreements that are outlined there? Why did he not draw our attention to that, instead of simply saying that they had been tabled, without any reference to the date or where they might be found? That is a rather strange procedure coming from this particular minister, who generally—

Mr. Martin: Don't be too hard on the poor minister.

Mr. Churchill: I do not see any reason why I should spare the minister. He does not spare us on occasion. Why should I spare him now? My hon. friend who has just come in suggests that the minister does not know anything about this legislation.

Mr. Martin: Let us get into committee and then put all the questions you want and test his knowledge.

Mr. Churchill: The minister suggests that we should get into committee and all the questions will be answered. Why were they not answered at the resolution stage? I noted at the resolution stage that the hon. member for Cape Breton South (Mr. Gillis) put forward very proper suggestions in the hope that, if they were acceptable, the bill might be altered accordingly. That is what the resolution stage is for. Matters are brought forward then which might have been overlooked in the drafting of the legislation and might subsequently be incorporated, but at the resolution stage we hurried along with that, and the bill was presented this morning, and very few people had time to do more than glance at it.

We have waited a long time in this country for an act of this nature. Its purpose is good. It is aimed to fill in the gap, with regard to people in need, that has not been adequately filled in during all these years. All of us are aware of the burden that has been placed upon municipalities chiefly and upon the provinces with regard to this type of assistance for people who are unemployed and have no recourse under those circumstances.

[Mr. Churchill.]

This bill is aimed at correcting that particular difficulty, but, as the hon. member for Hamilton West has pointed out, there is a floor placed under this. The assistance is not forthcoming until certain factors of unemployment are established, and it may well be that the bill is not going far enough in dealing with the question that it sets out to solve. Again, at the resolution stage, if this information had been placed before us it would have been very helpful. The minister has not given us any information as to the differences between the agreements with the provinces who have already signed; nor has he indicated any of the difficulties that are holding up acceptance of this proposal by other provinces; nor has he told us anything about the anticipated cost. Yet he is asking us to put through legislation here which leaves us in a state of indefiniteness as to the financial burden involved, and it is our job in this house to examine the financial burden. It may well be that that is not going to be excessive under present conditions in Canada. I think all of us are anxious to assist those in need in the country, but nevertheless the financial obligation under this legislation has to be examined and understood and fitted into the general picture. Why did the minister not give us some information along that line? Is the same thing to happen in the committee stage?

Mr. Martin: No. My hon. friend will appreciate that that figure could not possibly be given, because no one can tell what rates will be set by the provinces, who will be the only ones to set the rates.

Mr. Churchill: There is a point in question. At the resolution stage, if the minister had painted in the background and given us the figures that have been paid out under unemployment assistance by municipalities and the provinces, then we would have had one sort of yardstick to go on for a 50 per cent contribution by the dominion government. That is the type of information that should be presented to this house to fill in the background. Then we would have some idea of what the problem was. It is all in a state of indefiniteness now.

I cannot for one minute believe—I believe the minister's statement, but I cannot believe—that there has not been somewhere in his department a calculation of the amount of money involved in putting forward an unemployment assistance proposal such as this. That, it seems to me, is basic to the problem. In other words, the need must have been established over the years, and it was referred to back in 1945. That need would be expressed in terms of dollars, and on the basis of that need you gradually reach the stage