

Unemployment Insurance Act

so long as they do not make projections and resort to a devious scheme such as the government did and then attempt to have clause 2 of the bill passed. I see that the President of the Treasury Board has a perplexed look on his face. We said it before and we say it now; the government knew on August 15 that this fund was in trouble. If you didn't know, you should have known; and if you did know and did not attempt to pursue it further, then once again I say you were incompetent and irresponsible, because legal counsel for the Unemployment Insurance Commission had a meeting with the minister's officials shortly thereafter and met with a number of legal counsel for several departments, the names of which have not been revealed. I suspect that meeting was to determine how you were going to face that problem without telling parliament. That was the devious scheme; and finally someone said, "Let us grab them by governor general's warrants."

• (2110)

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Alexander: They are oh-ing and ah-ing over there. This was your devious scheme to bypass parliament. And you expect us to stand here quiet, shackled and helpless. There is a parliamentary secretary laughing now.

Mr. Basford: Your own fellows are laughing too.

Mr. Alexander: There are four reasons why we need a ceiling. First, we need a ceiling because then the government will be so involved with the scheme, in terms of unemployment, that its whole fiscal and monetary policies will have to be directed to the development of the nation in order to reduce unemployment. A ceiling would give the government some impetus to work toward reducing the unemployment rate. I do not hear anybody questioning that so I suppose it is accepted.

Mr. Basford: If we interject, you criticize. If we don't interject, you still criticize.

Mr. Alexander: The second reason for a ceiling is to give some impetus to the Unemployment Insurance Commission in terms of administration. If you don't have a ceiling, who will care? There can be haphazard administration or no administration at all. As long as officials know there is a ceiling and they cannot grab a buck every time they turn around, this will make the commission think of what it should be doing to tighten up the administration, to eliminate abuses and to make the scheme work at the cheapest cost to the Canadian taxpayer. The Canadian taxpayer does not mind paying money when he sees it going for a good cause. But when he sees it going down the drain and is told it is only a drop in the bucket, then he becomes worried.

The third reason for having a ceiling—I think this is also of some importance—is that we must maintain parliamentary control, no matter who sits on the government benches. I would speak the same way if I were sitting on that side of the House, Mr. Speaker; and that is something we in this party will be doing in the very near future. We must give some semblance of strength to the House of Commons. Without that we might as well all go home

[Mr. Alexander.]

right now. We might as well give up if we are simply going to spend money at the whim and fancy of cabinet without the consent of parliament.

I cannot understand how members of the government had the nerve to bring in this bill. The fourth and most important reason for having a ceiling is that the government has not given us any indication of what the cost of this scheme will be.

Mr. Basford: The money isn't for the government; it is for the unemployed.

Mr. Alexander: You say the money isn't for the government? I beg your pardon. You won't tell us how much the scheme is going to cost. We have a right to know. All of us were out on the hustings recently. We promised we were going to find out what was going on here. But I do not think many hon. members on the government side promised that. They don't give a damn. As a result, they are displaying the same old arrogant attitude. I thought they had learned a lesson.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. Is the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman) rising on a point of order?

Mr. Saltsman: Would the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Hamilton) permit a question?

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, not on your life. The hon. member can get up in debate and do all the questioning and answering that he wants. I have given four reasons why I think it is necessary to have a ceiling in this bill. I have never been more serious in my life than when I stand here now and try to convince hon. members, both in front of me and to my left, that it is necessary to have a ceiling in the bill.

Clause 2 also bothers me. I know other hon. members will become involved in this argument. I listened to the Minister of Justice explain it in terms that he believed would be acceptable to the House and to the nation. Once again he did not leave us with anything we could grab on to, and all I can say is that clause 2 came about as a result of section 23 of the Financial Administration Act.

The government went to the Minister of Finance and to the President of the Treasury Board and said, "Let us get an appropriation." It was an appropriation then, and in my respectful submission this meant it was a grant coming from the consolidated revenue fund. But now the government says, "Oh, no. Even though we took it under section 23 and the following section, we don't mean that to be a grant. Even though most of it is our fault because of high unemployment, we are going to call it an advance so that it can come within the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act and be paid back from premiums contributed by employees and employers."

I do not know what is wrong, but any time I see the words "deemed to be an advance" under section 137 of that act, something smells. Something smells when it says it shall be deemed to be this and not the other. It leaves me with the impression that in the first instance it was an appropriation. In order to clear up that ambiguity the government now introduces this bill, asking us to approve this type of nonsense that it has been projecting ever since