

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton-Melville) moved motion No. 23:

That Bill C-27, an act to establish the Department of Employment and Immigration, the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission and the Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971 and to amend certain other statutes in consequence thereof, be amended in Clause 50 by striking out line 17 at page 27 and substituting the following therefor:

"the House of Commons, fix the rates of".

Mr. Walter Baker (Grenville-Carleton) (for Mr. Alexander) moved motion No. 24:

That Bill C-27, an act to establish the Department of Employment and Immigration, the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission and the Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971 and to amend certain other statutes in consequence thereof, be amended in Clause 50 by striking out lines 17 to 24 at page 27 and substituting the following therefor:

"The Governor in Council and on notice to the House of Commons by way of ministerial statement within five days of such approval, fix the rates of premium that persons employed in insurable employment and the employers of such persons will be required to pay in that year to raise an amount equal to the adjusted basic cost of benefit under this Act in that year as that cost is determined under section 63."

Mr. Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, motion No. 23 is relatively straightforward. Since it concerns the principle of political accountability I hope all members will support it. It seeks to amend Clause 50, which has to do with premiums employers and employees pay into the unemployment insurance fund.

Clause 50 says that in respect of each year, "the Commission shall, subject to approval by the Governor in Council, fix the rates of premium . . ." My motion would remove the reference to the Governor in Council and in its place put "the House of Commons." The amendment would make us all more accountable politically for what happens to the unemployment insurance fund. Changes in premiums would need to be approved in this House where members can question the minister and either approve or not approve recommendations he makes on behalf of the Unemployment Insurance Commission. In that way we should make democracy work in the real sense of the word. All too often our public servants make important decisions—in saying this I do not mean to criticize public servants. They act first, and the government follows, and by the time it knows what is happening—and I point to the example of the former Solicitor General and his position with respect to the break-in in Montreal—

Mr. Rodriguez: A cover-up.

Mr. Nystrom: —it is too late. All too often the ministers come into the picture after the bureaucracy has made the important decisions. Accepting my motion would ensure that the House of Commons would consider all premium changes. In the past the commission has imposed higher premiums on employers and employees all too often without the approval of the Governor in Council. My motion would change these conditions and provide for political responsibility, and thus make democracy work better. After all, unemployment insurance premiums are another form of tax on the working people of this country, a tax which in total amounts to several billion

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dollars a year. Therefore we are not talking about small amounts of money; we are talking about billions of dollars. In many ways this is a tax bill. When we have a tax bill we, as members of parliament, should have some input.

● (2210)

I hope that members on all sides will realize that this is a totally non-political amendment and will support it. I see the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Dionne) is laughing in a very positive way this time. He is not being negative now. He is about to leap to his feet and utter some words of support for this highly rational and sensible motion that we are moving. I am sure that the members of the Conservative party will do the same because they profess to be great democrats.

I anticipate that we will have no problem getting this motion through the House and that we will have the co-operation of everyone concerned, including the House leader of the Conservative party.

Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to what the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) spoke about in connection with his amendment. While all of us in this House agree with the principle of accountability, we have to bear in mind the question of flexibility and the ability of the government to move on these things.

I do not want to plead the government's case, but motion No. 23, allowing the House of Commons to fix the rates does cause some danger in terms of flexibility. This is what concerns me about it.

The House of Commons traditionally rises at the end of June, the first of July or thereabouts. At least we always hope that will happen. It usually stays out for a long time, until the fall, when there might be some necessity for a change to be made. There is also the matter of the period of an election which could be called to add additional time to the time in which the government legitimately might wish to make changes. I would be very much concerned if it would make changes only for the sake of change during election time. I cannot believe any government, even this government, would do that.

I listened very carefully to the hon. member. He suggested this could perhaps be done by way of resolution. He said that would offer an opportunity to question. I do not think that would happen. There would be a resolution all right, but certainly not the questions about which he was talking. It is not a debate on a bill which, if we followed this suggestion, would eventually lead us to a motion on second reading and go to a committee where questioning could take place. Nor is it a statement upon motions in this House where questioning could occur. If it is the desire of the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville to have questioning and examine as such, I say that the foundation for the approach by way of resolution that he proposes would cut out from under his suggestion.