

Unemployment Insurance Act

courtship". We should not confuse gentle courtship with marriage.

Mr. Rose: Would the hon. member permit a question? Is the hon. member suggesting that the New Democratic Party members would be unfortunate allies should the government be defeated and members of his party asked to form a government?

Mr. Nielsen: May I say in reply to that question that should that be the situation, of course not, and the legislation which would have been forthcoming last December rather than now, because that is when parliament would have been called, would have been of such an attractive nature that members to my left could not have possibly avoided supporting it. It would have been aimed at curing the situation.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Next question.

Mr. Andras: A \$900 million ceiling; that is the kind of legislation you would get.

Mr. Nielsen: They want unlimited access to millions upon millions of dollars. Also, with respect to clause 2, they distorted our position because what they wanted us to do, to which we objected on second reading, was to ratify an illegality, and it still remains that, notwithstanding the position taken by the Minister of Justice (Mr. Lang). We remember last year we were debating the illegal position taken by the Minister of Justice. He involved himself in that debate, as did other members on the government side, and the members to my left then knew the government position was wrong because they were withholding lawful payments to the farmers for some 14 months. In the face of a mandatory provision in the bill, which could not have been clearer, the Minister of Justice said that they had the discretion to withhold those payments. He is taking the same sort of weak position today. There should be no clause 2. The provisions of the Financial Administration Act as they now stand should apply, and these funds should not be deemed to be an advance.

I think I have summed up the position of this party, certainly as I understand it, with respect to the two clauses of this bill. I think I have made it sufficiently clear now so that perhaps others might be dissuaded when taking part in this debate from accusing us, and continuing to accuse us on this side, of preventing unemployment insurance benefits from being paid. We object to the legislation, first, because it gives the government a blank cheque, and certainly the people of Canada want to see us adopt a positive stand to prevent that kind of thing from happening here. Second, we take the position with respect to clause 2 that it would be unconscionable for parliament to ratify something that was illegal. How, members say, do we assert control if not by taking off the ceiling?

The government had three choices open to it, and they still have those three choices, in order to obtain these funds in the proper manner and in order to allow parliament to continue its control over appropriations. First, they can bring in an appropriation and ask for a specific sum. They can do that, I say, because they know now

[Mr. Nielsen.]

what the Minister of Finance is going to put in his estimates with respect to government requirements in that regard. Second, they can bring in a supplementary estimate specifically for that purpose. Again, parliament would have to deal with it. Third, they can amend the act and provide specifically for the funds that they need. But going on in this fashion is taking all parliamentary control away from the members of this house and giving the government a blank cheque. It is wrong and it denudes the House of Commons of the traditional power to pass all appropriations and all money requirements of the government.

It is not enough for the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre to cite the legislation affecting pensions, the legislation affecting other matters similar to pensions, because those funds are not being abused. There are not billions of dollars being spent out of those funds in an abusive fashion. We know that the government is not controlling the operation of the commission properly. We know that they are not controlling the effective expenditure of these funds. That is all the more reason for parliament to retain that kind of control in the manner that I have suggested.

Mr. Charles H. Thomas (Moncton): Mr. Speaker, my purpose in speaking on this bill today is to try to dispel some of the misinformation that has been spread through the House in the last two days of debate. Certain hon. members in the House have continually tried to obscure the real purpose of this bill. They keep telling us that failure to pass this bill will destroy the Unemployment Insurance Act, and that failure to pass this bill is persecution of the poor. We have heard all these phrases about riding into power on the backs of the poor. We have heard this time and time again from government spokesmen, and we have heard from the NDP that this is just a bill to provide advances. Yet they say that if we do not pass it we will destroy the Unemployment Insurance Act.

• (1620)

I agree with the hon. member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) who expressed the hope that the minister would make some remarks on third reading. I was one of the members who sat on the Labour Committee. I realize it was not any fault of the minister that he was not able to be present. He sent in a substitute but, so far as I was concerned, the substitute might as well have stayed in bed because he either could not or would not answer any questions. Repeatedly we tried to find out from the minister why the ceiling was included in the act in the first place, and second, what had changed in the course of a year and a half that made it necessary to remove the ceiling. The minister's only reply was that obviously it should not have been in the act in the first place, and further he said that the government did not want it there now because things have changed.

A year and a half ago the department was able to estimate the costs of this program within \$10 million over a full year's operation. That is what officials told us a year and a half ago in committee. Now, suddenly this department, with all its know-how and all its knowledge, cannot specify any amount that should be stipulated for advances. The officials say they cannot forecast with any