

regard. It is amazing how people can be wise after the event. Members of the official opposition said they knew all along that the unemployment insurance bill was a terrible bill.

It seems to me that the director of the Canada Council on Social Development is preaching for a call as the deputy minister of national health and welfare under a Conservative government. He says now that the Unemployment Insurance Act is a disaster, but when that bill was first being discussed he praised it to the hilt. We are now hearing from the Auditor General, another friend of the official opposition, about what should have been done.

The real reason the fund is in trouble is that we have had in almost every month of the last three years more than 6 per cent unemployment on a seasonally adjusted basis. When the Unemployment Insurance Act was being amended, the government said the premiums it proposed employees and employers would pay would keep the fund solid provided unemployment remained at 4 per cent or less, and if it went over 4 per cent the government would pick up the deficit in the fund. When that bill was going through parliament and the committee, the unemployment rate was 6 per cent and it has remained at 6 per cent or more every month since then. Is it any wonder that the fund is now in a deficit position? Of course it is in a deficit position if the premium was set too low to meet the cost of carrying the fund when you have 6 per cent unemployment. That is the real reason the fund is in trouble.

• (2110)

But the official opposition want to get rid of the government. They want to take over. I cannot blame them. That is part of the political game. We all want to get more support, more power for the parties we represent. What I resent is that members of the official opposition are trying to play both sides of the game. They are trying to cater to a backlash which they detect and which, unfortunately, is present, a backlash against welfare and unemployment insurance, and at the same time they do not have the guts to do what they ought to do if they mean what they are saying—that is, to vote against the bill. They know that if this bill is not passed the unemployed will not get their benefits, and they are certainly not prepared to face up to that responsibility.

What were the criticisms of the hon. member for Hamilton West and others who say that the act was a disaster? I say that what they criticized played a very minor role in the deficit with which the fund was faced. They suggested that instead of qualifying after eight weeks of employment, people should work a minimum of 12 weeks before qualifying for benefit. I suggest that the number of people who are drawing benefits after eight weeks is relatively small and that the amount of money which they get has very little effect on the fund.

They also object to the sickness provisions. I note that that great humanitarian, Mr. Baetz, the executive director of the Canadian Council on Social Development, also suggests that the sickness provisions should not be in the bill. But what does Mr. Baetz suggest as a solution for the people who are sick? He says let them be included in the provincial medicare plans. Mr. Speaker, all Members of Parliament know how short of money all provinces are

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and there is not the slightest chance that the provinces would agree to pay sickness benefits to people who are unemployed. Mr. Baetz is simply suggesting that we cut those people off unemployment insurance benefit and let them look after themselves. That is a great approach from somebody who is supposed to give leadership in the welfare field. What about maternity benefits?

Mr. Baetz also pointed out that certain groups of workers do not work long enough ever to pay unemployment insurance premiums to cover the amount which they will draw. He is right, Mr. Speaker. But who are those people? The main group I can think of comprises the fishermen on the east coast. I would like to know whether members who represent the fishermen in the maritime provinces, most of them Conservatives, agree with their friend Mr. Baetz. Do they want the fishermen cut off? Mr. Baetz says the fishermen should get the help they need from provincial or local welfare organizations. I am not a resident of the maritime provinces but I know something about the less than generous rates paid to people on welfare in the most prosperous provinces and I am sure the maritime provinces, with their financial difficulties, are not in a position to be very generous.

It is not often I agree with the hon. member for Hamilton West, but he did say one thing with which I must agree. Yes, Mr. Speaker, the government should have known in August that the fund would be in trouble. I join him in his criticism of that. Yes, the government should have had parliament deal with it then, and it did not; parliament was dissolved. Now we have questions here and in the committee about whether the Governor General's warrants were genuine to meet unemployment insurance benefits from January 4 to January 11. There are questions about whether those warrants were proper and legal. We had the Auditor General suggest that there was no need for the last warrant because parliament was meeting on January 4, and the first day it met a bill should have been introduced by the government in order to provide the money.

I can just imagine the howl of rage that would have come from the official opposition when parliament met on January 4 if the government, before it introduced the Speech from the Throne and had a vote which demonstrated that it had the confidence of the House, had introduced a bill to provide money for the unemployment insurance fund. We would have had a fantastic number of speeches from members of the official opposition telling the people of Canada that the government was not following the tried and true rules of the parliamentary system.

I agree that the government should have known better about the financial needs of the fund, just as for four years or more we said that the government should have known better about the number of people who would be unemployed.

An hon. Member: Why are you supporting it?

Mr. Orlikow: Because I want the people who are unemployed in my city, in Toronto, in Hamilton, in Halifax and in every other city and village, the people who have paid their unemployment insurance premiums and have qualified to receive benefits under the act which is now the law of the land, to get their benefits. Like every Member of