

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mr. Clark: This bill comes to us at this late stage in what really has been a parade of incompetence by this government. First, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) announced last August that he had suddenly discovered restraint. A month after that this minister got up—

[*Translation*]

Someone asked why I was not here for the vote yesterday evening. I had a good reason. I was away in the interest of national unity, since I was taking part in a program recorded in French designed to inform Quebecers of the policies of the Conservative party, as it is obvious that only our party is able to keep our country united. We need the support of French Canadians. This is what I was doing yesterday evening. That is why I was not here to vote, but I will be here often for votes and I doubt very much that the members opposite will often be in the House after the next election.

[*English*]

We have had a veritable parade of incompetence. First, the Prime Minister discovered restraint in August. Then the minister discovered the need for this bill in September, but he was not able to bring it before this House for two full months. What is clear about that delay is that although the government should have been preparing this legislation and putting it together carefully over the summer, it was not because members of the government did not know that they had discovered restraint until they heard the announcement on August 1. That came as a total surprise to them. Consequently, they did not undertake the preparation they should have if they were going to put last summer to good use. If they had put last summer to good use and if they had been serious about introducing amendments which would have saved money and reduced inequity, they would have brought in a very different bill from the bill with which we are dealing in the House now.

This bill is designed to pretend restraint. It is not at all designed to achieve restraint. The bill is badly drafted. The Economic Council of Canada warned against this approach to this problem before the bill was introduced.

The ten provinces of Canada, including the one Liberal province—by one seat—the province of Prince Edward Island, and all the other provinces unanimously warned against this approach. Even the one NDP province warned against this approach during committee stage.

Mr. La Salle: Quebec too.

Mr. Clark: And the province of Quebec—

[*Translation*]

—the province of Quebec where they have reservations with respect to this bill along with all other provinces because this is not an effective bill which can meet the objectives contemplated by the ministers, on the one part, or by other Liberal members, on the other part.

[*English*]

I must give particular credit to my colleagues the new member for York-Scarborough (Mr. McCrossan), the hon.

[*Mr. Clark.*]

member for Vancouver Quadra (Mr. Clarke), and others who have proposed very serious improvements and reforms with which unfortunately the House of Commons will not be able to deal because this government is so concerned about support among its own members that it has introduced closure to cut off debate and stop parliament from carrying out the work of reform which parliament is here to carry out.

What is worse than this parade of incompetence is that the minister refuses to accept improvements, and for one reason: He did not propose those improvements. He would rather take credit for a bad bill than share credit for a good bill.

Mr. Maine: Absolute nonsense.

Mr. Clark: That contempt for parliament which is evident in the minister's rejection of amendments which would improve this legislation was also made absolutely clear when he deliberately and knowingly went ahead with the publication in the *Canada Gazette* of provisions in this legislation before this parliament had an opportunity to pass upon those provisions.

Mr. McGrath: The minister will be hearing more about that.

Mr. Clark: As my colleague the hon. member for St. John's East (Mr. McGrath) says, the minister will be hearing more about that, as will his colleagues, particularly from Atlantic Canada and les régions de l'Est du Québec. They will also be hearing a great deal more about the minister's comment when he deliberately went out of his way to attack a generation of people in Canada, to attack a region of this country and to attack those who live in areas of high unemployment and who are not able to move. He attributed to them the basest of motives for being in a situation which is largely the creation of this government because of its failure in economic policy.

There is no question at all that the unemployment insurance program of this country very much needs reform. It costs much more than it should. It builds in a disincentive to work. It encourages too many Canadians in this land not to seek to develop their own potential. It includes serious invitations to abuse. The question I have to raise—and indeed the question will be raised across this country whenever an election comes—is why will the Government of Canada not take the time which parliament is here to give to improve this bill? Why does the government force this matter through, simply to save itself from embarrassment because its own members disagree? Why does the government force this bill through and not allow us an opportunity to consider and debate specific, positive reforms which would save more money and which would have other beneficial effects? Why does the government not want to consider the reforms proposed by the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra and others in this House.

We know that this is the sixth or seventh bill in eight years dealing with the unemployment insurance question. It will not be the last one because the bill will create new injustices and it will require further changes later on. What is absolutely unacceptable to us on this side of the House is that the Government of Canada is forcing a bad bill through parlia-