

posed legislation no such opportunity will be provided. This is a negation of everything we have come to believe is part of the democratic process and the principle of responsible government. I cannot understand why the government is balking at accepting this amendment. We ought to have some explanation from them as to why they think, in levying a tax upon several million workers in this country, the House of Commons should be bypassed and the power placed entirely in the hands of the governor in council.

I recall the days when the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) headed a government in this country. The Liberals were on this side of the House. They were constantly crying out that the Diefenbaker government was exercising arbitrary and dictatorial powers. I would like to know what they consider these powers to be, namely, the powers to levy taxation without reference to the elected members of parliament. We are entitled to something better than stony silence from the government, particularly the minister, as to why they are not prepared to refer back to parliament any changes in the rates which are charged the workers of this country under the unemployment insurance plan, so that the members of this House may know in detail what the rates are, why they are being increased, and whether they are being increased equitably across the work force of this country.

● (1130)

Surely, these are basic rights. I know the government has become very arrogant of late. Its attitude is very different from that taken when it found itself in a minority position and when the poll returns were somewhat discouraging. But its present arbitrary attitude is not justified. The government owes the House some explanation, and if it cannot supply one then the people should be appalled that hon. members opposite are taking this dictatorial attitude, assuming the right to impose levies on the workers, to take money out of their pay cheques in the absence of approval by the representatives of the members of this House.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West): Mr. Speaker, I rise to express the concern of my party about what is happening under this amendment as it applies to the setting of premiums for payment by both employers and employees. I listened to hon. members on my left, and I can only say I am in some doubt as to whether parliament has the competence to do what they want done. I was here last Thursday until 10.15 p.m. However, I believe the House went on until 10.30 p.m., so I missed a small part of the debate. Nevertheless, I read the argument put forward by my hon. friend from Grenville-Carleton (Mr. Baker) who expressed concern about the difficulty which might arise if the House of Commons were to attempt to set the premium. In fact, I do not know exactly what is meant by that phrase, "the House of Commons fixing a premium". Do hon. members to my left suggest the House should become involved in the mechanics of sections 62 and 63, extremely complicated sections having to do with the fixing of these rates? With all due respect, I do not know whether we have the competence to do so.

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Nevertheless, I can well understand the point the hon. member has just made. It is, in effect, taxation without representation. As I have indicated, it might be doing a disservice to the Commons to involve it in an attempt to determine a formula, and so on. But perhaps what they are having in mind, really, is to let the government bring in a figure, subject to approval by this House. Is that what they are suggesting?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Would the hon. member permit a question? Does he realize that what he has just said is the case, rather than what he said earlier? Will he look at both our amendment and his own, and realize that in both cases it is the commission which sets the rates? The difference between us is this: we ask that what the commission has done should be subject to the approval of the House of Commons. The hon. member's amendment asks that what the commission does should be the subject of a statement in the House. In neither amendment is it proposed that the House of Commons should do the technical work of fixing the rates.

Mr. Alexander: Let me read through the NDP motion. I was under the impression that it read, "the House of Commons, fix the rates".

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That is just one line.

Mr. Alexander: Don't get all shook up and say, "It is just one line". I think what the hon. member is talking about is approval given by the House after the governor in council has fixed the rates.

An hon. Member: The same as ours.

Mr. Alexander: All right. Don't get carried away. I am trying to understand the NDP motion and determine whether or not it is practicable. It seems the motion put forward by members to my left is similar to ours, except they want the approval given by the House of Commons before the rates come into effect.

An hon. Member: Right.

Mr. Alexander: Let us review the history. First, it was the commission who set the rates, and no one had anything to say about them whatsoever. The minister then proposed that there should be some accountability. So the commission will set the rates and the governor in council will approve them. There is that further step included. In effect, it means that ministers on the front benches of the government side will have to approve the rates. After approval, the minister would come into the House and make a statement, whereupon the spokesmen for the opposition parties would have an opportunity to make statements in response, and to ask questions.

Mr. Speaker, we have found in the last two or three years that ministers are disinclined to make statements in the House. They would much prefer to go before television cameras or talk to newsmen outside. What I was seeking in my amendment was at least to ensure that changes in premium rates, or