

Unemployment Insurance Act

• (2040)

The government tells us it cannot agree to any limit. At one stage another \$100 million was suggested. Could they cope with that? What about a further \$100 million? But they did not want to make any prediction. Why? Because they claimed they were not able to make any prediction. Yet, Mr. Speaker, in December when the Unemployment Insurance Commission, among other government agencies, was asked to forecast its requirements up to February 8—and it was precisely February 8 they were asked to forecast to, not some time early in February, or a few weeks hence, or whenever the government could persuade those bad hats in the Conservative party to vote the funds which were needed—they were able to do so. And with such claim to accuracy that the Minister of Immigration told us he was satisfied that their estimating was accurate to within an hour either way.

So evidently it is possible to forecast requirements. Here I renew my invitation to hon. gentlemen opposite. If they have a problem paying the unemployed whom they have put out of work on purpose, they should not try to hang it on us. All they have to do is to come here with an appropriation. They have proven they can forecast how much they need to within an hour on any given date. The hon. minister is waving his hands. I do that a lot. So, arriving at a figure should not be any problem for them. We, as I said earlier, speaking on behalf of all my hon. friends, will pass that appropriation right away.

I do not think there is any doubt that this bill will pass. I do not think anybody here seriously doubts that proposition. I shall not belabour the House with any more metaphorical talk about connubial relations between the Liberals and the NDP. I think that metaphor has been worked to death. I would not like to see any marriage really consummated because of the possibility that the offspring might be so hideous as to stagger the mind. The unemployed, there is no doubt, will get their money and I am as happy as anyone that they will do so. I think I have reasonably good credentials to come here and talk about this bill. I have been a labour union member and an organizer for unions. I have a great many friends in the labour movement and I have first-hand experience—

Mr. Olivier: Oh, yeah?

Mr. Reilly: Where did that sparkling bit of repartee come from? We are bubbling with wit in this House. I think we could probably spare some for the other place. As I was saying, there is no one on this side who is any more genuinely or sincerely concerned about the plight of the unemployed than I am.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Reilly: I would expect that juvenility and cynicism from the back benches of the Liberal party. I have fairly good credentials, I think. But I intend to vote against this bill for the reason that it is a vehicle of shame, fraud, irresponsibility and incompetence on the part of the government and for the reason they have tried to blackmail me and others like me by this phoney concern of theirs about whether the unemployed will get their money. They are trying to shame us, though they created the mess.

[Mr. Reilly.]

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Reilly: It was they, on their own initiative, who created the mess they are in right now. It was the Prime Minister who conceived that ill-begotten scheme and who persisted in it despite the best advice offered to him. It was they who fumbled and flapped and fooled around through three years of disaster. It was they who deliberately created unemployment. It was they who foisted on the people of Canada a bill of goods about an unemployment insurance plan which would take care of itself by reason of contributions from the workers and the bosses and a minimum contribution from the government, that faceless nonentity which just produces money from its pocket.

It was the Trudeau government which ignored the sufferings of the people and used fraud to bail itself out of an unconscionable situation. And it continues tonight to insist that it cannot live with a reasonable limitation which would assist parliament in the control of its profligate spending habits despite the fact that the senior financial official within its ranks said not two weeks ago that this kind of limitation was a highly desirable thing.

This is the record of the government. It is a record of incompetence, of fraud, of shame, of total lack of regard for the unfortunate people of this country. And they are stuck with it and they are welcome to it.

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, I do not wish to speak at great length tonight on Bill C-124 but I should like at least to make a few remarks that seem to me to be absolutely vital.

The government has introduced Bill C-124 to raise the ceiling that had been set by a previous bill to \$800 million, to make up the deficit of the Unemployment Insurance Commission and pay unemployment insurance benefits after February 7.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague the hon. member for Kamouraska (Mr. Dionne) when he says that we are not here in this House to play politics or to use parliamentary procedures to run the fund dry and deprive the unemployed of Canada of their benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I think that it is the duty of hon. members—even though this government is directly responsible for failing to foresee the situation when it had all the necessary data to do so—notwithstanding any political consideration not to reject the consequences on the unemployed but to allow them to get what they are entitled to.

One must remember the basic principle that those who contributed to the unemployment insurance fund did so out of their pockets in accordance with the act and that when they are out of work the government, in return, must pay them benefits.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, I would not like to pass this opportunity to say to the hon. Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Andras) that he is incompetent and irresponsible and that he is deliberately misleading the House. I know what I am talking about, having already met managers of provincial unemployment insurance offices and having discussed week after week with more