

Those parts of the brief contain the gist of motion No. 2 which has to do with freedom of information and the public's right to know. Canadians are becoming ever more concerned about the way governments act and spend money, most of the time in secret. I suggest it is time to include in all legislation some provision saying that unless there is good reason to keep government action secret, governments should work in the open without the secrecy which is detrimental to the Canadian people.

May I now turn the attention of the House to motion No. 3, which says, in so many words, that the council shall meet at least once a year and that minutes shall be recorded of all formal meetings. I was pleased to note that when we discussed another portion of the bill in committee the minister was ready to accept a similar amendment to the one now before us. In essence, motion No. 3 says that the council shall do everything "necessary to carry out its duties provided that without restricting the generality of the foregoing it shall meet at least once a year and minutes shall be recorded of all formal meetings." Notice, I do not say that such minutes shall be available: I do not go that far. I only say that minutes shall be recorded of all formal meetings so that they are available, say, in respect of a legal action. The point is that they ought to be available, and it will be enough if minutes are recorded. Also, the council ought to be required to meet at least once a year. For all I know, it may meet once a month or more often. However, a minimum number of meetings should be stipulated.

Nothing in motion No. 3 or motion No. 2 will hamper the effectiveness of the council. We are saying that when the council reports to the minister on how effectively the UIC program is working, the public has the right to know what it says. Further, the legislation should stipulate that the council shall meet at least once a year and that a record, or minutes, shall be kept of all formal meetings.

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I wish to speak briefly on motions 2 and 3 proposed by my colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander). As the committee examined Bill C-27 it learned several things about the advisory council. Mr. Speaker, it has always been my impression that an advisory council is appointed to give advice. In this case it will give advice concerning the UIC. If we exclude the question of making such advice public and the question of whether there ought to be a free flow of information with respect to government reports, what bothers me is the ad hoc way the advisory council operates. Its operations, it seems to me, are part and parcel of the way the bureaucracy operates. They fit into the scheme of things. I have observed, in my own innocence, that there seems to be a war going on in the bosom of the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen).

● (1200)

The bureaucrats wish to have the only direct line to the ear of the minister. They would never allow an advisory council to advise with regard to the operation of the whole structure of

unemployment insurance. It is only natural that they want the minister's ear to themselves, and maybe other parts as well.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodriguez: They want his ear in order to have direct input to the minister. Indeed, in committee we discovered that any kind of role that the advisory council played was on an ad hoc basis—behind the chesterfield, in the cupboard, or on the telephone. I asked the chairman what he thought of that. We asked for the minutes, but we did not get them. We were told there was a sort of buddy-buddy, ad hoc, off-the-cuff kind of advisory role which the council was condemned to play. We asked what role the advisory council played in the comprehensive review of the Unemployment Insurance Act on which Bill C-27 is based. It is an important review because of the way in which the Unemployment Insurance Act is operating in this country. We asked whether it was serving the purpose for which it was set up.

An hon. Member: It is outdated.

Mr. Rodriguez: Yes, it is outdated. Apart from that, one would think an advisory council made up of employee representatives, employer representatives, government people and bureaucrats would have some direct input. With regard to any meaningful role that the advisory council ought to play, we found that their participation amounted to as much as you could put into a thimble.

Freedom of information is paramount in motions Nos. 2 and 3 moved by the hon. member for Hamilton West. I support them wholeheartedly. They tend to give importance to the advisory council; in other words, to give it status. It says to the minister, in spite of all we have been saying about an advisory council, that parliament expects some effects from it.

I have been here since 1972. I have seen the unemployment insurance representatives come before the committee on estimates, on Bill C-69, and the present bill. I have never seen anyone from the advisory council before this committee. They are well hidden. We have never heard their views as to how the Unemployment Insurance Act is being administered. We have never been told whether what was implemented in 1971 is doing the job it was designed to do.

I repeat, we have not seen a copy of the minutes. I do not think they exist. If they do exist, it is only in the minister's imagination. There may be something on paper which says the minister shall establish an advisory council. I am not crazy about the way in which the advisory council to the Unemployment Insurance Commission has performed. If these amendments will in any way upgrade the role of the advisory council, any time debating them will be well spent by this parliament.

One would hope that the advisory council would meet more than once a year. The committee heard a lot of witnesses when considering Bill C-27—witnesses for the employers and for the employees. By and large, their views looked at opposite sides. Indeed, there was only one area where employees and employers seemed to concur. That was with regard to the approach to