

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, July 7, 1977

The House met at 11 a.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION REORGANIZATION ACT

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND
IMMIGRATION, ETC.

The House resumed consideration, from Tuesday, July 5, of the motion of Mr. Cullen that Bill C-27, to establish a Department of Employment and Immigration, the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission and the Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971, and to amend certain other statutes in consequence thereof, be read the third time and do pass; and the amendment thereto of Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, when I was on my feet on Tuesday of this week, speaking on the amendment of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), to refer the whole question of the qualifying period back to the Standing Committee on Manpower and Immigration, that is, the work period required for people with minor attachments to the labour force to make them eligible for unemployment insurance, I mentioned the fact that after the committee had completed its deliberations I had written to all the premiers and major trade unions across the country. I thought that was the right thing to do for any member of the House who wanted to make some constructive suggestions on any bill at any stage.

When I was speaking last Tuesday, I read into the record the first letter I received, which was from the Premier of New Brunswick, Mr. Richard Hatfield, who, I believe, is a Conservative premier. He wrote a very honest letter, part of which I read into the record. I also read from the brief his views with respect to the report stage of the bill and committee hearings on it. I pointed out that Mr. Hatfield was concerned about the fact that there seems to be no meaningful consultation among the federal and provincial governments with respect to legislation. Mr. Hatfield pointed out that Bill C-27 and the superimposition of 54 regions with respect to unemployment insurance reflected this very dramatically.

The whole point he made was that the government always responds in an ad hoc way to criticism of legislation. The premier was particularly critical of the fact that while the

government recognized regionality in the amendment brought in by the minister whereby in three years a qualifying period of 14 weeks will be required before a person will be able to obtain insurance benefits, the opposite seemed to be true, and the premier said that amendment was unacceptable to his province and to his government. He raised the question as to whether the government expects regional disparities to disappear overnight in three years' time. Surely, if the argument for disparity exists now as a result of the inaction of the government, it will exist in three years' time. So why should the government propose the elimination of regionality? I admit that I do not share Mr. Hatfield's political ideology or philosophy, but I certainly appreciate his honesty and the manner in which he responded to an opposition member from this corner of the House. He was co-operative and informed me of the kind of thinking that is going on within his government.

• (1110)

In the committee the United Auto Workers very clearly outlined labour's response to Bill C-27. The message that came through loud and clear from the UAW was that this is not the time for the government to be tampering with the Unemployment Insurance Act, and that the government ought to be going about the business of stimulating the economy and introducing policies which will create employment opportunities. The government should not be blaming victims for their own predicament at this time. The UAW made a very moving appeal in its brief. The brief said, "We want jobs. We want employment opportunities". In a very emotional way, the UAW made the argument that the right to work is as basic to Canadians as the right to education, free speech or organization. I think this government has far too long used the unemployed and unemployment in its fight against inflation. The government has used the unemployed as scapegoats in its effort to remain in power. That is what this debate is about. The government thinks it can get off the horns of this dilemma easily, but I hope the people of Canada will focus on what is taking place in this House.

I hope the people of Canada will realize that unemployment does more to disunite the country than it does to unite it. For the last two days there have been many pious speeches and there has been much rhetoric about loving each other. It has been said that the way to solve our problems is to love each other. Suddenly we are going to have a national love-in, and that is supposed to cure the problem of disunity. The youth of Quebec are experiencing 16 per cent unemployment, while the national youth unemployment rate is 13.8 per cent. That is a great disincentive to unity. When one part of the country has a high youth unemployment rate, that is certainly a disrupting influence and is a cause for disunity.