

too high. All that is needed is that there be sufficient working advances so that the government can carry it. For the members to my right to block it is utterly irresponsible. It is not worthy of them. For our part, we believe in unemployment insurance. We believe the unemployed people of this country have their rights and that is why we are supporting this bill.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Verdun):** Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to get sidetracked too much by the remarks of the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) who is using the word flip-flop as part of his vocabulary now. I do not think anyone in the House of Commons has done as many flip-flops as that hon. member has in the debate in recent weeks on unemployment insurance.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Mackasey:** I am more interested in getting on to the impression that the hon. member and other hon. members of this House have left, namely, that the worker of this country is lazy, that the plan has been abused and that there is some type of stigma about unemployment insurance. I think that the following facts, hopefully to be reported by the press and arising out of the evidence before the miscellaneous estimates committee and given to me by the present minister, will put to an end once and for all the concept that Canadians have abused this plan flagrantly.

• (2150)

In 1972, the year just completed—that is the first year under the new act—we had the concept of universality, which meant that over 7,150,000 workers out of close to nine million members of the work force paid into the unemployment insurance fund and were therefore eligible for benefit under certain conditions. In 1970, the last full year under the old plan, when we did not have universality, when coverage was restricted—as hon. members know, there were no school teachers, hospital workers or casual workers contributing—there were only 4,900,000 covered by the unemployment insurance plan. In 1972, 7,150,000 people were paying into the unemployment insurance scheme, and despite the high rate of unemployment there were 2,099,000 claimants.

In 1971, there were 2,092,000 claimants and in 1970, out of a work force of about 5 million, there were 2,049,000 claimants, a drop of only 50,000 compared with those drawing unemployment insurance this year despite the fact that the plan of two years ago required 30 contributions for eligibility and this year only eight were required. Where are the abuses that the people across the way are so prone to talk about?

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Mackasey:** The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has said it much more eloquently than I can. The hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) knows as much about the Unemployment Insurance Act as the present minister or the former minister. Yet he has found it convenient to disown the very act

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he was so proud of—convenient to disown the steel workers of Hamilton.

**Some hon. Members:** Shame.

**Mr. Mackasey:**—and play up to the reactionary forces in this country in the most flagrant manner I have ever heard in debates in this House in recent years. He is responsible, intentionally or otherwise, for the distortion which has gone on in this debate about the \$800 million.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre has drawn attention to the fact, the minister has drawn attention to the fact and it has been stated ad nauseam before the various committees, that the \$800 million is nothing more than a method by which the government lends money to the commission for day to day financing. And when it is accounted for in April, hon. members will find that the government owes all but \$159 million. The rest is owed by employers and employees, and the act provides that the backlog must be picked up through increased contributions. And they will be picked up. There is no mystery about this. The hon. member for Hamilton West understands it. You see, he loves to walk along a tightrope, appearing to be a friend of the steelworkers on the one hand and passing as a great lawyer on the other. But he cannot have it both ways all the time and constantly be on both sides of the fence in Hamilton.

I know something about that city, as the hon. gentleman is aware. I can remember walking through Gage Park in the thirties. The unemployed were lined up in rows, passing a single newspaper from one to the other. We in this party don't want to get back to those days.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Mackasey:** Only once did the hon. member get on the right track. That was when he said the government had the responsibility to bring unemployment down to an acceptable level. In the interval, those who were unemployed through no fault of their own should not be forced, by the reactionary tendencies of the party opposite, to forgo benefits which are properly theirs.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Mackasey:** The defeat of this bill, as the hon. member who is a prominent lawyer knows, would make it impossible for the Unemployment Insurance Commission to pay to the innocent victims of unemployment their benefits next week, or the week after, or very soon. How it is wrong to have a ceiling of \$800 million, and then propose an amendment that it should be \$900 million when he says that \$800 million is much too high—

**Some hon. Members:** Oh, oh!

**Mr. Mackasey:**—is a technique I cannot possibly follow. He comes in with an amendment that it should be \$900 million. That is a piece of logic I cannot understand.

**Mr. Alexander:** I rise on a question of privilege, Mr. Speaker. I do not mind the ravings and rantings of the former minister, but I do not want him to put words into my mouth which have not been uttered by me.

**Some hon. Members:** Question.