

Unemployment Insurance Act

Mr. Clarke: They may be entitled to only one vote, but in that committee we saw how NDP tactics for delaying things work. Some of us who were there had somewhat higher motives than those of the NDP.

An hon. Member: Get a halo.

Mr. Clarke: If there is any question about the motives of the NDP, I think we need only refer back to November 10 when this bill was referred to the committee. We heard no objections from the NDP. As a matter of fact, I do not think any member of the NDP was here that day.

An hon. Member: What about the Tories?

Mr. Clarke: The Tories were here that day. They were anxious to get this bill into committee so that it could be given the detailed examination which only a committee could give to it. I think 34 committee meetings should be adequate to allow that kind of study. I think it is obvious that the NDP wants to continue its delaying tactics. One tactic is to move to delete clause 1, which sounds innocent enough, but it would subvert the whole bill.

I want to state why it is the intention of my party not to support motion No. 1. It is the stated intention of my party, and has been for some time, to support restraint on the part of the government. Speaking for my party in the second reading debate, I said that this bill was a step in the right direction, but we do not like the minister's proposals, and I think that probably became obvious when we opposed the bill in committee. However, we have hopes, and the amendments proposed by members of my party should indicate that we hope that the government will see the light before this debate ends. It is our intention to re-submit our amendments at this stage.

I want to say a word about why we oppose this motion and about what complaints we have regarding the government's methods. We will be debating our proposals fully as we proceed with this debate, but it is obvious to us that the minister made proposals which would not strike at the problem which we and the public perceive to be present in the unemployment insurance system. The minister's proposals are more inequitable than we would like them to be.

As a national party my party was able to accept proposals made by three provincial ministers on behalf of all the provinces and territories. It is worth noting that included therein were the agreements of the New Democratic Party province and of the Liberal party province. I do not think there is anything unusual in the national Progressive Conservative party seeking to agree with six provincial Progressive Conservative governments. It demonstrates that we as a party can work on a national basis to put forth ideas for which there was agreement. The proposals put forward by the provinces were a fairer method of solving the problem of unemployment insurance inequities.

● (1612)

The scope of the bill does not allow for many of the inequities. As I have said many times, it is unfair that many

[Mr. Clarke.]

Canadians who are not entitled to benefits under the unemployment insurance system must nevertheless contribute to what I call the deficit and to what the minister calls a commitment. One can call it what one wants, but it costs taxpayers approximately \$2 billion every year. Hard working, self-employed Canadians and those retired on pension are not entitled to benefits under the scheme, yet they are required to pay into the deficit. We do not think that is fair.

Members of the New Democratic Party talk about their labour friends and how angry they are about the cutbacks. There are working people in my riding, as well as a lot of people concerned with labour. The view of labour organizations does not surprise me—that some of their members will lose benefits. The majority of working Canadians realize that they pay not only through payroll deduction but also toward the \$2 billion deficit. They do not like that fact, and they do not think it is fair. The abuses are well known to workers. In fact, they are probably better known to the workers of the country than to many of us in the House. The proposals of the government will not be effective in getting at the people who need to be curbed in order to make this scheme an insurance one.

The government's proposals will load an unfair burden on to many of the less affluent provinces. This was pointed out by the provinces. It was not done deliberately by the government, but through ineptness. It put proposals forward without studying how the costs would filter back into the provinces. The government was not receptive when this was pointed out. We consider this to be bad, and it led to our amendments. Perhaps we borrowed our proposals from the provinces, but they will save more money than the proposals of the government aimed toward restraint. Our proposals are less complex and adhere more closely to insurance principles. When the House considers our motion, we will deal with the proposals.

I sympathize with members of the Liberal party. Perhaps they have been required to put their scheme into effect more quickly than they would like. For approximately two or three years, my leader called for a major overhaul of the unemployment insurance system. The government commissioned a report entitled "A Comprehensive Review" in 1976. In February, 1977 the government released a report on that comprehensive review. One would think that the government had enough time to get matters into shape; but the government cannot even put the pregnancy amendment into effect because it does not fit into the rules concerning the presentation of motions.

When the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) came back from Bonn this summer, he saw the light. He announced to Canadians that restraint was necessary and that further announcements would be made. The Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Cullen) had the finger pointed at him. He was told to get his amendments going and on the table. Dutifully, the minister made an announcement on September 1. He announced his program to the world at large. Approximately two months later, the minister introduced his bill into