

in order if he sought and acquired the unanimous consent of the House, but not otherwise.

Mr. Hawkes: Would the minister be agreeable to just a few brief questions regarding those two announcements, the provision of regulatory change and the appointment of a task force?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Blaker): Order, please. It is not a question of whether the minister is agreeable. The Chair does not establish rules on a personal basis. The will of the members is reflected in the standing orders but, from time to time, members may want to change the manner of proceeding, and that is agreeable as long as it is unanimous. It may be that the minister is prepared to answer questions, but I could not permit him to do so unless the hon. member sought and acquired the unanimous consent of the House.

Mr. Collette: On that point of order, Mr. Speaker, I have not discussed this with the minister, but had he chosen to make a statement at three o'clock in the usual way during routine proceedings, he would have done so, and questions could have followed. I suggest to the hon. member that he will have adequate opportunity to question the minister and his officials when this bill goes to committee. There may be a disposition at the end of his speech for the minister to answer a question, as is done from time to time. I think it would be setting a dangerous precedent, however, if we transferred the work of the standing committees into this place when we are discussing the broad principles of the bill on second reading. This bill will not be going to Committee of the Whole but to the standing committee, where there will be ample opportunity for the hon. member to cross-examine the minister and his officials.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I might begin by pointing out that we are already two and one half months into this Parliament and the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration has yet to meet, other than for purposes of organization. Our opportunity to question the minister regarding his estimates and his bills has been severely limited as a result. I would urge the government House leader and the party opposite to get on with holding these meetings so that we can get the information we require.

Mr. Collette: You are a member of the steering committee.

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, that is incorrect. I am not a member of the steering committee.

Mr. Collette: You should be if you are interested.

Mr. Hawkes: We are here today to give second reading to Bill C-3, an act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. This is the eighth time since 1971 that the government has brought forward an amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act, which I think points to the fact that the bill is not exactly a shining star but might be referred to as a tarnished star. It requires constant change because it was badly drafted in the first instance and its continued use gives the minister,

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his departmental officials, and the Canadian public, considerable difficulty.

The bill was drafted by the previous government in the Thirty-first Parliament. As the minister has said, it addresses itself to two basic principles. The official opposition would agree with those principles at this point but, nevertheless, I should like to review them for just a second.

The bill extends to June, 1982, the variable entrance requirements. What that means in the case of some Canadians who may be less familiar with the language than are members of this House, is that in the high unemployment regions of this country one is required to work for as little as ten weeks before becoming eligible for benefits from the unemployment insurance fund, while in other areas the minimum is 14 weeks. I think some other members on this side of the House will address themselves to the difficulty this causes in their ridings.

Whether or not difficulties are caused by this provision, it has become increasingly clear that, as a result of the economic policy set by the government opposite, we have had a decade in which to begin to correct the regional unemployment imbalances in this country, yet in the year 1980 we are no further ahead than a decade ago and in many instances we are further behind.

The variable entrance requirement is a humane provision and is designed to help those who need help most. Members on this side of the House are consistently committed to that principle. On this side of the House we believe that social policy should be directed toward those who need the help of that policy the most. Therefore we are prepared to support the extension of that principle until June, 1982.

• (1550)

As an aside, I might point out that that is the clearest indication, despite repeated questioning in Committee of the Whole on Bill C-19, from this minister that he expects a high unemployment rate to continue through at least until June, 1982. If the minister opposite felt that there was going to be some kind of dramatic turn-around, he would not have asked us for this longer term extension of the variable entrance requirement provision.

The second aspect of Bill C-3 is, as the minister says, taking the money, taking the benefits or the premiums paid in and the obligations or the benefits which are paid out and taking those out of general revenue and moving them back into a readily identifiable insurance fund. That was an idea which members of the Conservative party came up with, and is a measure which we fully support. If we are going to call this an unemployment insurance fund, then I think there should be a recognizable fund. The value of such a recognizable fund is that Canadians can look at that fund and they can tell whether or not that fund is in or out of balance. They can tell what their premiums are doing in relation to that fund. They can tell what the benefits are costing, and Canadians can decide whether or not it is in or out of balance, and what should be done about it. In a sense, it corrects one of the chronic habits of the party opposite, that of flimflam. This change in the law