

Employment and Immigration

this House, however, he has indicated he is prepared to accept or to find no fault with the last part of the motion, so I hope the House leaders can get together on the suggestion of the minister. Mr. Speaker, you have indicated that my motion No. 2—

Mr. Speaker: Order please. The motion has not been formally called.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West) moved motion No 2:

That Bill C-27, an act to establish the 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 amended in clause 21 by striking out line 35 at page 8 and substituting the following therefor:

"ister extend and the minister shall cause any reports related thereto to be laid before parliament within 30 days after the receipt thereof or if parliament is not then sitting on any of the first 30 days next thereafter that parliament is sitting."

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have indicated that motions Nos. 2 and 3 would be grouped together for debate, but would be voted on separately. Therefore, perhaps I can simply call motion No. 3 at the same time and direct comment to be made on both motions at the same time, with the understanding that they will be voted on separately.

Mr. Lincoln M. Alexander (Hamilton West) moved motion No. 3:

That Bill C-27, and act to establish the 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 amended in clause 23 by striking out line 9 at page 9 and substituting the following therefor:

"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."

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will speak on motions Nos. 2 and 3 at the same time. Through motion No. 2 we are now setting up what is called the Canada Employment and Immigration Advisory Council. The clause to which my motion refers is very simple. It reads as follows:

21(1) It is the function of the council to advise the minister on all to which the powers, duties and functions of the minister extend.

At this time I want to refer to the CMA brief only. What I am attempting to do with this particular amendment is set out as follows:

—and the minister shall cause any reports related thereto to be laid before parliament within 30 days after the receipt thereof or if parliament is not then sitting on any of the first 30 days next thereafter that parliament is sitting.

As I said, all we are talking about is freedom of information. We must give credit to our good friend, the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) who has been a champion in this regard. As the hon. member has so often said, governments do not want the public to know how public money is spent.

[Mr. Alexander.]

• (1150)

An advisory council is to be set up. Actually, it is a somewhat expanded council. Mr. Speaker, really I am not speaking about the report the council must file at the end of the year. That is a statutory matter. It must advise the minister on certain statutory matters. I am not talking about that. I am talking about the public's right to know: the public's right to information. Suppose some questions concerning harassment, overzealousness, abuse, etc., arise; or suppose the minister wants to know if certain provisions of the act are a disincentive to work, or an incentive. Then the council would be asked to give its advice and report to the minister. Such questions have nothing to do with national security, subversive activity or civil rights. Such questions, basically, relate to how well the legislation is working, and the council reports to the minister on these matters. As I say, really, we are talking about freedom of information and the public's right to know.

The Canadian Manufacturers' Association submitted a brief in February 1977, to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration. As you know, sir, the CMA had representation on the former council and unquestionably will be included on the one to be established. Labour representatives will also be on the council, as will government appointees. When the CMA is concerned about the public's right to know, I understand it speaks both for labour and management. In this regard I shall read section 53 of the brief entitled "The Public's Right to Know". The section reads:

If the advisory council is to have an effective involvement in policy-making, beyond acting as a sounding board but short of assuming decision-making powers which can only reside in the government itself, one key to effectiveness lies in the right of the public to know what the advisory council recommends from time to time and how the government has responded to those recommendations.

As I said, the CMA had representations on the advisory council. In making this representation concerning the public's right to know, I understand the association is speaking on its own behalf and that of labour. I continue quoting from the brief. Section 54 reads:

The council should have considerable latitude in determining its own procedures and methods of operating in relation to such matters as when or if it conducts public hearings, the use of outside expert advice and venue of meetings beyond those required by the act. We note with satisfaction that an annual report of the council's activities will be tabled by the minister in the House of Commons and therefore become a matter of public knowledge and record.

Section 55 reads:

However, the association believes we should have more ambitious hopes for the role which the council could play and for the example it could set for other advisory or consultative bodies in assisting in the development of social policy for Canada's benefit.

Section 56 of the brief is entitled "The Council's 'Right to Know' ". It reads:

The public's right to know about the council's activities and recommendations would be of little value if the council itself were not to have reasonable access to information from the government and in particular from the department of employment and immigration and the minister. Bill C-27 provides the minister with discretionary authority in this regard. This right of the council should not extend to draft legislation or other information which could jeopardize Canada's national security.