

Unemployment Insurance Act

inefficiency. I could talk about the ways in which they yielded because of the backlash during the election campaign, but we can sort all that out later. What I insist on right now is that we have had enough of this playing with the unemployed by suggesting that it was illegal for the government to get their payments to them when, in point of fact, the law required that this be done. Let us now tell the government to get on with the job of coping with unemployment itself. That is the real problem.

• (1750)

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Caouette (Charlevoix): Mr. Speaker, I do not want to waste the time of the House because I feel that the bill now under consideration is a mere joke.

During the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne, I stated that I was surprised by the cheekiness of the government members who said one thing, but acted otherwise.

Today, once again the government shows its inconsistency. When I compare the comments of the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) in his statement before the Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates with the bill now under consideration, I am disgusted.

A press release dated January 17, 1973 and entitled "Comments on proposed amendment to the Unemployment Insurance Act concerning total advances" reads in part as follows:

This bill recommends the elimination of the \$800 million ceiling on total advances. Such a ceiling is not realistic since it is based on unstable factors such as national and regional unemployment rates, average income rates and labour force expansion.

In committee the necessity of ceilings is confirmed while in the House it is denied. One could believe that the government is taking us for clowns or more exactly for chickens. It is intellectual indecency or unconsciousness on the part of the government. Perhaps you think that I am joking but I will quote the President of the Treasury Board.

On page 25 of issue No. 2 of the Minutes of Proceedings of the Committee on Miscellaneous Estimates you will find the following question from the member for Yukon (Mr. Nielsen) and I quote:

MR. NIELSEN: There seems little purpose in having a ceiling at all in the act under those conditions.

MR. DRURY: No, Mr. Chairman, I suggest there is a very good purpose in having a ceiling. This particular ceiling, I suggest, was put in in order that Parliament would have an opportunity to examine the reasons for the circumstances surrounding any sums in excess of this, which is precisely what we are engaged in now.

It was precisely what we were also engaged in at that time. This is what we were doing. We were trying to determine why the \$800 million ceiling had been exceeded. But those lines were hardly printed when the government rejected any studies of this kind. They want to establish an arbitrary system, without ceiling and intended mainly to prevent parliament from looking into the matter. And I further quote the minister:

I do not want to make a great thing of this. Parliament would have an opportunity . . .

. . . of inquiring into the operation of the fund if the amount of the advances exceeded \$800 million. If the ceiling had been set at a hypothetical figure, \$5 billion, there would have been no occasion

for the issue of Governor General's warrants. There would have been no occasion for a parliamentary examination of the operations of the fund or the commission. By placing this limitation, the executive is required to come before Parliament to explain how and why it happened and what changes should be made.

Mr. Speaker, what is the purpose of all this? Why should a minister who claims to be responsible bring forward such an argument when his own party suggests the opposite? Is that cabinet loyalty? No wonder problems are never solved. Are government members striving to get us mixed up or are they themselves so mixed up that they don't know what to do?

Overnight, ceilings are removed and the worst of it is that, although there is no money, they are promising reimbursement plus interest.

To seek to remove the \$800 million ceiling because it is impossible to make accurate estimates, to make an adequate assessment of the fluctuations of unemployment rates, well and good. I am even prepared to accept the minister's indirect recognition of his department's inefficiency.

In fact, whether there is a ceiling or not on the estimates is irrelevant. Workers do not want to know which measures the government intends to take to control unemployment insurance to its advantage but they do want means to be taken so that the government will fulfil its commitments on their behalf.

Even if in committee the official opposition wanted to be overcritical about the illegality of the procedure and even if today the government tries to cover up its mistake by bringing in this bill, we want action, amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act, a speedier procedure for payment of benefits and especially deference for the right of the worker to the benefits which he has paid when he was working and which are now due to him. These are the things we ask for.

Mr. Speaker, I am quite willing to accept the proposal of the government, but why promise reimbursement plus interest when we already know the preference of the department? Once again the worker will be penalized by the accountants and employees of the state.

Mr. Speaker, has anyone ever heard of a civil servant working for the Unemployment Insurance Commission having to wait for 15 weeks to get his salary? No. The one who pays is penalized; he has to wait; he is made to play hide-and-seek. But we make sure the parasite is reimbursed, and we even pay him interest, dividends. But who pays the bill? Again as always, the taxpayer, the worker.

Mr. Speaker, is this bill going to change the worker's situation in any way? It does nothing positive. It only gives the government the guarantee of being able to dig into the pockets of taxpayers without parliament—according to the President of the Treasury Board—asking any questions.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, may I call it six o'clock?

Mr. Caouette (Charlevoix): Six o'clock.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): It being six o'clock, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at two o'clock.

At six o'clock the House adjourned, without question put, pursuant to Standing Order.