

to allow the minister to make a statement. Is there such unanimous consent?

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Speaker: There is not unanimous consent.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, on a further point of order, I was not asking for a statement on motions but for a brief indication in answer to my question or a willingness to come here tomorrow to make a statement.

Mr. Speaker: Again, this would require unanimous consent of the House. We have now gone beyond the question period and there are a number of members who have been waiting for an opportunity to ask questions.

An hon. Member: About the same thing.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I appreciate the importance of the matter raised by the hon. member for Egmont, and perhaps tomorrow he might be given some priority to ask the question and to invite the minister to make a statement.

Mr. MacDonald (Egmont): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, can we be assured that the Secretary of State will be here tomorrow because, in view of the half-hearted system under which the government operates, we can never be sure what ministers are going to be in the House?

Mr. Speaker: Orders of the day.

• (3:50 p.m.)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT, 1971

PROVISIONS RESPECTING INSURABLE EMPLOYMENT,
COMMISSION, BENEFITS, PREMIUMS
ADMINISTRATION, ETC.

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Minister of Labour) moved that Bill C-229, respecting unemployment insurance in Canada, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-229 is a bill designed to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act once again, but perhaps for the first time in a more comprehensive manner than has been the case on previous occasions. I do not intend to dwell at any length on the history of the existing act. The proposed bill is a very long bill. I think it would take too much time to cover it adequately. I hope, however, that during the debate on second reading, and perhaps in my closing remarks, I might do justice to this bill which I believe is for the general betterment of workers in this country.

I should like to remind the House that the original Unemployment Insurance Act has been around since

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

1941, almost 30 years. It has been one of the stable pieces of legislation in this country and has become familiar to all of us. Upon reflection, I think it is one of the most progressive pieces of social legislation ever introduced in Canada. It is interesting to note that back in 1941, when unemployment insurance was first implemented in Canada, the ceiling was at earnings of \$2,000 a year. We can see that in 30 years times have changed considerably because even the existing act which we are proposing to amend has a ceiling of \$7,800.

Before going into the details of the proposed changes, I should like to mention the work of the standing committee which discussed the white paper that was made public many months ago and tabled in this House, although not necessarily in that order. From that particular committee, which worked for many months and heard, I presume, some 60 odd briefs from labour and management, came, I gather, a unanimous report which was tabled in the House and which includes at least seven recommendations for improvement.

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I hope the minister does not mind my interruption. He said it was an unanimous report of the committee. I do not want to be placed in the same position as the chairman of the standing committee found himself in some time ago. So there will be no mistake, I must say that the report was approved on division.

Mr. Mackasey: I accept that, Mr. Speaker. I did not want to imply that amendments by any members of the committee would not be entertained. I am not aware of a minority report, but we never are during committee stage and second reading. Nevertheless, in accepting the reservation of the hon. member, I still think the work of the committee deserves some commendation in the House of Commons because, as I recall the events, the committee members were called upon to sacrifice some of the summer holiday period and meet in Ottawa to hear briefs, from labour, management and many different groups of people. Although the report may not be as unanimous, as I assumed it was, it is nevertheless a reflection of the committee's work at its best.

One thing from which we have not departed in this bill is the fact that the proposed new legislation will deal with a specific group of Canadians, essentially those who can be identified as being part of the work force of Canada. One of their basic characteristics, of course, is that they are in the work force but that periodically they suffer an interruption of earnings for a temporary period of time. In other words, unemployment insurance was never intended, nor is it intended, to look after the particular problem of people who are chronically unemployed or who are without jobs for considerable periods of time. These less fortunate people must turn to other programs for the type of financial assistance that is needed. There has been no basic departure from that particular condition.

The bill that is before us reflects to a great degree the recommendations in the committee report by implementing many of the recommendations that the committee