

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, June 27, 1977

The House met at 11 a.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

EMPLOYMENT AND IMMIGRATION REORGANIZATION ACT

MEASURE TO ESTABLISH DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND
IMMIGRATION, ETC.

The House resumed, from Thursday, June 23, consideration of Bill C-27, 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, as reported (with amendments) from the Standing Committee on Labour, Manpower and Immigration; and motion No. 23 (Mr. Knowles, Winnipeg North Centre) and motion No. 24 (Mr. Alexander).

● (1110)

Mr. John Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday we discussed motion No. 23, which calls for the House of Commons to fix unemployment insurance premiums. We think, since the House of Commons is the supreme body in the land, it should have authority to fix premium rates and to review those rates, for such a review would give the House the opportunity to review the commission's administration of the act.

We pointed out on Thursday how concerned we are about the perceptible and deliberate shift of control from the hands of elected members to the hands of bureaucrats. Increasingly, our bureaucrats are taking over the decision-making function. This bill would lump responsibility for immigration, manpower and UIC under one deputy minister who would be responsible to the minister. Surely that prospect ought to send shivers up our spines. Yet, lo and behold, in the bill as written we are to allow the commission to set its own rates and effectively to avoid the control of the House of Commons. I was first elected to this House in 1972, but only three years later were we able to bring the Unemployment Insurance Commission before the standing committee of this House to explain the shortfall of between \$800 million and \$900 million in the unemployment insurance fund.

It is said that the estimates give us the opportunity to question. I point out that by May 31 all estimates are reported

back to the House. Even those not passed by the committee are deemed to have been passed and are reported back. Therefore, no matter what members of parliament think about the estimates, come May 31 the estimates leave the committee and are reported to the House. That is why this amendment is important, for it would vest the control of unemployment insurance premiums in the House of Commons.

I said on Thursday evening that members on my side of the House are increasingly concerned about the power of this country's bureaucracy. It seems that the minister is no longer responsible for the policy direction of his department. The previous minister told us about a year and a half ago that the whole question of the minor attachment period was a red herring thrown across our path, that there was no evidence of abuse, nor evidence to show it was a disincentive to work. Now, 1½ years later, the newly appointed minister says, "The minor attachment is a disincentive to work. We have the evidence." What has brought about this change in position in 1½ years? Clearly, the reason must be advice of bureaucrats. It seems that a war is going on within the bosom of the minister's department, one group of bureaucrats pushing one course and one set of policies, another pushing another set of policies.

Clearly, one group was in the ascendancy 1½ years ago and had the minister's ear; now the other group is in the ascendancy. Unless we can reverse the trend, the minister will lose control of his department. As it is, our ministers do what the bureaucrats tell them. When we were in committee we noticed how the \$62,000 a year men and the \$50,000 a year people were annoyed when we asked them how they administered the department. They resented specific questions on details of the unemployment insurance program.

It seems, therefore, that the minister is losing control of his department and it is time to vest control of the program in parliament where it belongs. Mr. Speaker, far too many of these issues are taken from the hands of elected representatives; and then we are told parliament is downgraded. The Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources (Mr. Gillespie) earlier today at a press conference outside the House announced a new program for home insulation. Notice, he did not announce it in the House of Commons where elected members could have dealt with the matter. That minister and others accuse opposition members of not dealing with matters important to the nation. How can they say that, when the government opposite does not allow parliament to debate and deal with these serious questions?

Our amendment would return to the House of Commons control over the setting of premiums. Many have said that unemployment insurance is not insurance, per se. We agree.