

The Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science

Evidence

Ottawa, Tuesday, June 22, 1971.

The Standing Senate Committee on Health, Welfare and Science, to which was referred Bill C-229, respecting unemployment insurance in Canada, met this day at 9.30 a.m. to give consideration to the bill.

Senator Chesley W. Carter (Acting Chairman) in the Chair.

[Translation]

The Acting Chairman: My dear colleagues, I thank you very much for your confidence, and I hope that you will have no regrets.

Senator Flynn: I don't believe so.

The Acting Chairman: Thank you.

[Text]

Honourable senators, I have here a telegram addressed to the Speaker of the Senate from a person named Kroeker, a name which will probably ring a bell with some of you. As I recall, he is a former civil servant. He signs himself as president of a group called Canadians for Responsible Government. His communication is not too clear, but I will put it on the record. It appears that he wants to come before the committee and dispute the costs of Bill C-229. I will read it slowly, because it is not too lucid:

Please inform all senators that the House of Commons has approved unemployment legislation in ignorance of or deliberate disregard of its full financial consequences an annual deficit of from four hundred million dollars to one thousand million dollars estimate by responsible citizens who offered to appear before the Commons committee and the minister in this regard has been ignored these witness are available to the Senate please consider fully before approving this unemployment insurance legislation with its large and long lasting damages to Canadians

John Kroeker President Cdn for Responsible Government

Senator Smith: Mr. Chairman, may I say something at this juncture? It will be recalled that when Senator John M. Macdonald spoke in the Senate, I presume as the spokesman for the Opposition, he made particular reference to the discussion in committee, and perhaps I should quote what he said:

—since we are approaching the time of adjournment I expect a long study will not be possible. Fortunately, I do not think one is necessary, as the committee of the other place had both the time and inclination to go over the bill in detail. We have the reports of their deliberations, which make very interesting and instructive reading.

I personally agree with what Senator Macdonald said. I believe it will be impossible for us to consider hearing a witness who represents nobody but himself, and in particular who writes that kind of telegram with reference to the House of Commons which is not permitted by even members of the Senate. If you want a motion, I will move that we proceed with the bill.

Senator Flynn: We should certainly proceed to hear the witnesses who are here.

The Acting Chairman: Shall we let this lie in abeyance? I was going to say, this committee does not have a steering committee. Had there been a steering committee they could deal with this sort of thing and make a report. Would it be worth while to have a small committee to look at this?

Some Hon. Senators: No.

The Acting Chairman: Or should we dispose of it now?

Senator Flynn: Not at this time. Let us proceed with the witnesses, and we can see afterwards. We can always inquire about the contentions contained in this telegram.

Senator Connolly (Ottawa West): The questions can cover that.

The Acting Chairman: We have before us a witness Mr. J.M. DesRoches, Chief Commissioner, Unemployment Insurance Commission, and Mr. David Steele, the Director General, Planning, Finance and Administration. I understand the minister will be coming soon. In the meantime Mr. Peter Connolly is representing his office. Shall we proceed with the witnesses?

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

The Acting Chairman: Before Mr. DesRoches begins his presentation, I should like to point out that this is a formidable bill. It has 160 clauses and some schedules beside that. It covers about 100 pages. It is divided into eight parts. It occurs to me that some parts would be of more interest to this committee than other parts. For example, Part I, the Unemployment Insurance Commission, sets up the Unemployment Insurance Commission itself. That has been in operation for a good many years.