

Unemployment Insurance Act

the result of unemployment insurance being added to the regular income earned by the unemployed in the last eight or nine months in the year, which will form the basis of the T4 assessment and taxation. That extra revenue will come to the government and has to be calculated as part and parcel of the final and precise cost to the government of unemployment insurance.

The precise cost to the employer-employee fund is fairly well known. I have quoted it as \$159 million. It is obvious that the \$800 million is too low to finance day to day operations at a time when unemployment is running high, but more particularly when we are paying \$68 a week rather than \$51. If that was a miscalculation, it was a happy one because it reflects that the people who are working are earning a better salary than they ever earned, or that we predicted three years ago, under a progressive government.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, tonight we have listened to an impassioned defence of the indefensible by the former minister who was responsible to this House for the unemployment insurance fund. In many ways, much of what was said was, regrettably, irrelevant to the bill before us. There was a great deal of passion. I have listened to the hon. member in the past and I have found him to be great at this; he would confuse the issue with irrelevancies. If he wants to talk about the reaction of the poor, I invite him to come out to western Canada—he would not dare to—where the working people are the people who voted against this scheme.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Let us not have any more of this demagogic nonsense. We have tried to make fair criticism. Those who should hang their heads in shame are those who put the former minister out to dry on a clothes-line after they had wrung him out.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

• (2150)

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): He was made the scapegoat for a collective decision of cabinet. If it were possible to refer to information that has come to us in another way, it would be easy to demonstrate that month by month, through statements made by the Minister of Finance, we had an indication as to the progression of advances to the fund. We did not have to wait until September to know that they were out; this was apparent in June. The statements were not tabled in July, or in August, or in September. Parliament was not sitting—how convenient! So it could be demonstrated, certainly before August, that the fund was in dire trouble and would soon go through the \$800 million.

The attitude of government supporters, including those to my left, is that if we owe a debt to the fund—and of course we owe a debt to the unemployed; we have an obligation to pay them their benefits—then we have to pay that debt. But it matters not how you get the money. It is the same as if one of us owed \$500 on an automobile or on a mortgage payment and got the money at the point of a gun and tried to justify it. Certainly that would be an illegal act. Or suppose we took it from somebody else's

[Mr. Mackasey.]

drawer; that too would be an illegal act. Such an act on the part of the government is contrary to a statute of parliament. They did not have the courage to come before parliament and the people of this country and admit they had mismanaged or misjudged affairs. Misjudged they certainly had.

The point we are arguing is this. The ceiling must remain because parliament is responsible under the act, not the cabinet. If there was ever a classic example of why there must be a ceiling, it is this particular occasion when the administration has been called to task to explain what it has done. The former minister, I think sincerely, advanced reasons for the action that was taken, but he has had to do it on behalf of the government.

We are told that if no ceiling is imposed then there will be an accounting to parliament. I ask, when? After the event, months later when the Auditor General's report comes out; and all that would greet the pécadilloes of the government at that time would be a big, big yawn. Since the government and its agencies are involved here, they must be accountable to parliament. This is why there must be a ceiling. There is no magic about the figure of \$800 million, but there must be an accounting to parliament.

As for the other point, I will be frank. I regret to say it, but as a result of the decision that the Chair may feel compelled to render, firstly with regard to the amendment of my colleague from Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) and secondly with regard to the point of order raised by my colleague from Yukon (Mr. Nielsen), this House has been placed in an impossible and an illogical position. The adoption of the government's motion will mean that this bill will go to the committee that deals with labour matters. The committee will consider clause 2 which deals with item L30a in the supplementary estimates. That committee, unless of course it follows direction, will arrive at its opinion and will report to the House. This same item, by decision of the House, has been referred to the miscellaneous estimates committee and that committee is coming to its decision.

An hon. Member: When?

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): A bright one at the back of me asks when. Obviously he is not on the committee. There is an undertaking that the report will be here by February 2. The decision in that report may be different from the decision of the other committee. So there is the position, Mr. Speaker; the same item is being considered under two separate motions of this House, and there is no way that can be done. What might have been done was to split the bill and send item L30a to the miscellaneous estimates committee. But this House has been placed in an impossible position as a result of the action of the government. I suppose we shall have to face the consequences. I must confess that I think there were some fatal flaws in the reasoning that denied the point of order raised by my colleague from Yukon. Nevertheless, since I feel there must be a ceiling, I do not like this bill.

Some hon. Members: Question.