

Unemployment Insurance Act

did we spend the extra \$50 million? Did we actually spend \$100 a head on each of those persons, for administration? I do not think we could possibly do that. I do not see how we had that extra expense of administration and suddenly found ourselves running out of money when we had an \$800 million limit.

We in this party have been accused of being against the poor and against the unemployed. In the chief city in my riding the level of unemployment is a little below that of the rest of Canada. The United Empire Loyalists are very hard working people and work when many others do not. I have no hesitation in saying that this party of which I am proud to be a member is not in any way against the poor or the unemployed.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ellis: We are fully cognizant of the problems of the unemployed and we think steps should be taken to find jobs for them, not unemployment insurance benefits. I am not going to deal with the legality of that question as other members on this side of the House have gone into it.

Mr. Speaker, I close with the thought that a tremendous hoax has been perpetrated upon us by this government in trying to get rid of a legal, logical limit that was self-imposed in the first place and now is being taken out to save embarrassment.

Mr. Mackasey: May I ask the hon. member a question, Mr. Speaker? In light of the honest way in which the hon. gentleman quoted me without text—and I compliment him because he was fairly accurate—did he state that I suggested that the whole deficit of \$189 million would be picked up at the cost of a dime per person over a one-year period? Is that what he suggested?

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I think at twenty minutes to ten in the evening we have debated this question sufficiently. The hon. member is quite capable of remembering what I said, which was that the figures given as to increases are not adequate and we will be faced with further increases which will have to be borne by the employers and employees in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, as I am under the impression that I will be one of the last to comment on this bill, I believe it is my duty to say a few words.

In my constituency, as, in fact, in all other constituencies, the number of unemployed greatly exceeds an amount we could call reasonable even though unemployment must be considered as a disease per se and should not exist in Canada.

I have listened to a few speeches with more attention and I realize that the government greatly exceeded last year's forecasts.

In my opinion, removing the ceiling is a sure way for the government of not having to give explanations to the House if it did exceed the set ceiling.

In fact it is quite logical to retain a ceiling as any administration must be very closely watched and I think

[Mr. Ellis.]

that an administration which exceeds anticipated credits must come before Parliament to answer for its actions.

Even if the bill under study were not passed, this would in no way prevent the beneficiaries from getting their benefits, because if funds were lacking, measures should have been taken in September to remedy the problem.

In my opinion, a ceiling in itself is not so bad, on the contrary, and I think that the government should explain to the House, if it had to exceed the ceiling, even though the one presently suggested by the Progressive Conservative party is quite higher than the previous limit.

• (2140)

I would like also, like the hon. member for Lotbinière (Mr. Fortin), on behalf of the unemployed in my constituency, to urge the minister to study a very important problem which is related to the services of the Unemployment Insurance Commission that should be improved in order to insure to the recipients that they will receive on time the benefits they are entitled to.

I think that in my constituency, as in all others, there is a serious problem about the Unemployment Insurance Commission services. In fact, there has been a lack of regional offices because of too much decentralization. I wonder whether efforts will be made in order to ensure better services so that recipients will receive their money on time. It has been said many times that these people have paid their contributions, as did those who never had to apply for benefits. I think it is important for the minister to consider improving this system by hiring additional personnel for the various offices and reverting to the previous administration which enabled the recipients to receive their benefits on time.

Many questions have been put to the minister who always answered by saying that he would consider complaints made by hon. members on behalf of hundreds of unemployed in my constituency and on behalf of thousands of others across Canada. I think that the importance of improving those services can never be stressed enough to the minister, in order that the unemployed can receive their unemployment insurance benefits instead of having to turn to social welfare payments as it happened again a few months ago.

I think that the problem is very serious and that, being aware of the situation, the minister should do more so that the unemployed can receive their benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I should not like to deprive the House of the opportunity to vote tonight, but since the unemployed are not happy with the present administration of the plan, it would be desirable for the government to provide explanations when the ceiling set is exceeded. That seems quite fair to me, because the ceiling set last year was substantially exceeded. However, I believe that logically we must keep a ceiling, not only to make the government aware that it is being supervised, but so that it may be forced to give the House its reasons for exceeding the ceiling. That is the only way for Parliament to obtain the required information.

Mr. Speaker, I shall close these remarks by inviting the minister to greater diligence in carrying out his task and