

degree to which there was basic agreement on the bill. This was the only purpose I had in mind. I certainly recognize that there are differences; the hon. member's speech made this abundantly clear. We can anticipate that at the committee stage a number of amendments will be proposed. The hon. member who has just spoken is a very highly regarded member of this House, and I am sure he does not misunderstand anything that has been said from this side.

• (3:40 p.m.)

But, Mr. Speaker, one of the things that was attacked before the committee was the provision of sickness benefits. I have not seen any statement, or heard any member of this House say, as was said before the committee, that the principle of establishing a new type of administration within the Department of National Health and Welfare, which would in effect duplicate the provision of an administration for collection of contributions, the determination of eligibility for payment of benefits, and so on, makes sense. But we had that kind of argument put before us, not once but frequently, in a series of briefs that came before the committee.

I note, for example, that the question of the need for co-ordination of this measure with other social measures has been mentioned by a number of speakers, and I am sure will again be examined in committee. Some of the benefits for those with lower incomes are not going to be adequate. Those in the categories of lower incomes are certainly going to find the initial waiting period difficult. There will have to be a measure of co-ordination with the Canada Assistance Plan to take care of situations where there will be genuine need, especially, in the case of families and dependents. This, we know, will have to be done, and I think all hon. members recognize it. But the problem is the most effective means of working out the arrangements that will be recognized as necessary.

I think, Mr. Speaker, that there is a surprising degree of acceptance of the principle of universality. I say surprising because of the attacks, again that were made in some quarters, in the representations before the committee. The principle of universality has perhaps been attacked most vehemently by the spokesmen for the teachers groups. I found the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), of the hon. lady for Vancouver-Queensway (Mrs. MacInnis), and of the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) in particular—

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): She may be a queen but the constituency is Kingsway.

Mr. Francis: I thought I said that, but I am getting a little flustered this afternoon. I found their remarks particularly interesting in this respect because all of us, after hearing the evidence, after listening to the teachers' delegation, after reading their brief and meeting with them, are substantially convinced that we should not breach the principle of universality under the bill for this group or any other group.

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

Indeed, the criticism, such as it was, that came from the other side of the House concerned the inability of the government to bring within coverage of the act certain categories of self-employed persons. I believe it was the hon. member for Hamilton West himself who said that unemployed persons cannot be really unemployed as a result of their own decision. He gave a definition that unemployment is not unemployment when it is self-induced, self-inflicted, or a matter of choice. This is exactly the problem in self-employment. The decision of someone to go into an individual type of practice, in a profession, in a business or service trade and the decision when to cease employment is a decision made by one person. This type of decision should not render the person eligible for benefit.

The problem of working out administrative devices and checks to prevent abuse in the self-employed area is very difficult indeed, and it is precisely for administrative reasons that the government has not moved in this area. It is not for reasons of principle. If we could devise the means I am sure the minister would be delighted to accept the idea of bringing self-employed persons within the act. He would have to be certain there would be some type of objective determination of unemployment, some type of protection against intentional abuse. Hon. members on the other side of the House who said we should be covering such persons did not offer any specific means of doing so. They merely said that something should be done in this respect.

At this stage of the debate, Mr. Speaker, it is not easy to add very much that is new, but I want to touch on one area in particular where I think we should try to set an example. I hope the provinces will not opt out of coverage for provincial civil servants under the act. I hope they will recognize the virtues of the principle of universality as such, that they will elect to have their public servants covered under the act, just as the federal public servants will be covered.

I also hope that at committee stage there will be a close examination of the problem raised by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, namely, how to cover Members of Parliament themselves under such a scheme, not that I am so worried about large scale unemployment in this area.

Some hon. Members: Why?

Mr. Francis: I have not found it very hazardous employment. But the hon. gentleman pointed out that there are certain pension provisions that intervene, and anyway a number of hon. members have means of going to other employment very readily. However, there are some who may be getting a little on in years and for whom interruption of service in this place would create problems of adjustment. I am not thinking in terms of benefits to hon. members but in terms of the principle of universality.

A number of the teacher groups have thrown this in our face. They have said to us, "You are not covering Members of Parliament, so why should you cover us"? I think we should, at least for the sake of moral example,