

Unemployment Insurance

casions. I don't know whether he was referring only to the latest steps taken, but I think he was referring to those undertaken some years ago.

I understand some attempts to settle the question had been made by the former Liberal administration, but had been unsuccessful, except perhaps with respect to other states, which as someone has mentioned, have accepted an arrangement. If my memory serves me right, the state of Vermont entered into such a reciprocal arrangement in 1948.

I believe it was in 1951, Mr. Speaker, that Canada adopted the contributory system, or perhaps I should say the joint system of unemployment insurance and employment service.

The unemployment insurance act, of course, had been passed earlier, and that act is now the main protection of workers against the financial risks of unemployment.

The original act was amended a number of times, and according to latest statistics, about 82 per cent of paid workers can enjoy its protection.

Moreover, benefits have been increased and the benefit period has been extended to cover seasonal unemployment.

In 1954, the Canadian welfare council submitted a number of recommendations to the Minister of Labour, suggesting amendments to the unemployment insurance act.

While a number of those recommendations have been carried out, there is room for further improvements such as—

(Text):

Mr. Speaker: Order. Perhaps I should remind the hon. member at this time that we are not debating the subject of unemployment insurance in general, but the desirability of making arrangements with United States authorities with respect to Canadian woodsmen working in the state of Maine. It is a very narrow subject, and I do not think the house would expect members to range freely over all unemployment insurance problems.

(Translation):

Mr. Martel: I thank you very much for your remark, Mr. Speaker. I was just going to mention that several recommendations of the welfare council were put into effect especially last year.

No doubt other improvements could have been effected similar to those suggested by the hon. member for Beauce (Mr. Racine).

[Mr. Martel.]

We could look into the possibility of accepting groups that are not yet eligible for unemployment insurance benefits and into the possibility of improving the regulations and services available through the unemployment insurance commission and the employment service, particularly with regard to the payment of benefits to Canadian woodsmen working in the neighbouring states.

Those benefits should certainly be paid to the group of Canadian workers mentioned in this resolution who are ready to work in the states of Maine and New Hampshire.

This afternoon I heard the hon. member for Matapedia-Matane (Mr. Belzile) make a suggestion concerning Canadian workers who take jobs in the United States.

Most of them are farmers or farmers' sons. The hon. member suggested that the coverage be extended to farmers and their sons.

In introducing his motion this afternoon the hon. member for Beauce mentioned the various states that have already signed an agreement. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that this problem should be solved immediately so, as mentioned by the sponsor of this resolution, it is important that we try to resume the negotiations with the states of Maine and New Hampshire to find a final and satisfactory solution for our woodsmen who have to go to the United States to earn the extra money they need to adequately meet the needs of their families.

The hon. member for Victoria-Carleton (Mr. Montgomery) pointed out that the member for Beauce had been fair—that is the word he used—in his remarks and that he had rectified the impression his resolution created that nothing had been done by the government to find a solution to this problem. I believe that the problem is important and deserves immediate consideration.

Before concluding, I would like to raise a point mentioned earlier by the hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges (Mr. Bourbonnais). He said that the Unemployment Insurance Act was the most necessary and useful measure adopted by the former government. I disagree with him there, because the first Unemployment Insurance Act was enacted by a Conservative government, either 1931 or 1932 if my memory serves me right.

(Text):

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member seems to find difficulty in confining himself to the main issue.