

Unemployment Insurance Act

agricultural labourer is not covered by unemployment insurance. Naturally any man seeking employment is going to accept the employment under which he can receive the protection of the Unemployment Insurance Act. That is only natural. I can relate numerous personal experiences from my close associations with a great many fruit growers and farmers in my constituency, where they have been considerably inconvenienced at harvesting times and at other times because they were unable to obtain farm help, and the reason they could not obtain it was because such labour was not covered under the act.

This has been a subject of discussion throughout the years by farm organizations, who have made representations to the former government and to the present government. But still nothing is done. It is still a topic of serious discussion with farm organizations and many farmers. To indicate how up to date I am on that, as recently as February 7 of this year the Canadian Federation of Agriculture made a submission to the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Diefenbaker) and members of the cabinet, and in that submission, on page 12, will be found the following paragraph:

Unemployment insurance for farm workers. While we appreciate that the unemployment insurance program is now under study by a royal commission, nevertheless we feel we must bring to your attention that the very real need for a selective, if not a voluntary, program of unemployment insurance for farm workers is still unmet—

Mind you, it is still unmet. That is an indication of how many times they have tried to persuade governments to amend the act.

—a matter of considerable disappointment to those farmers who find that they are seriously disadvantaged by this situation.

I am not very struck by some of the grammar here, but I can see what is intended.

If a voluntary program for agriculture cannot be brought in, we would recommend early extension of compulsory coverage to those areas and/or groups of producers who have clearly indicated their desire and willingness to participate in such a program.

Mr. Speaker, as we discuss this question some hon. members from urban ridings may feel that this seems a matter almost of academic interest and not of great importance. But it is of great importance to a farmer or a fruit grower when he is anxious to get help for a week, for two weeks, or for a month, in order to harvest his crop or to carry on some of his operations. Therefore, we are not anxious to delay the debate. We want to see a vote taken before six o'clock. We should all like to see this resolution adopted unanimously by the members of this house. But we do urge the government

[Mr. Herridge.]

again, as we have in the past over a good number of years, to give consideration to the inconvenience suffered by many farmers at the present time owing to the failure of the government to act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. Should this discussion unfortunately continue until six o'clock and nothing is done in a constructive way to give consideration to this resolution, we hope that the matter will come to the attention of the committee on agriculture and that the representatives of the farm organizations representing various segments of agriculture be given a particular opportunity to deal with this problem and present their views.

(Translation):

Mr. Clement Vincent (Nicolet-Yamaska): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of several farmers in my riding and in my province, I would like to say that I support the motion presented by the hon. member for Humboldt-Melfort-Tisdale (Mr. Rapp).

The seasonal worker is not the only one to suffer from the situation that has just been explained. In fact, several farmers in my area, as well as several farmers in my province, have asked me to be their spokesman on that subject and to press the government to study the possibility of allowing the farm workers to draw unemployment insurance benefits, just like other workers.

As other workers benefit from the Unemployment Insurance Act, as well as the fishermen since quite recently and a few other seasonal workers, it is more and more difficult, if not impossible, for several farmers to find good men to help them with their work.

Mr. Speaker, when a farmer wants a man to work on his farm, the first question he is asked by the eventual employee is the following: Do you contribute to the unemployment insurance fund? Since the farmer's answer is always or nearly always "no", the prospective helper, the person who is seeking employment unfailingly replies: "I am not interested; I would rather work where I can get unemployment insurance benefits".

That means that in the province of Quebec and in my riding, certain big farmers who employ helpers all year-round have to do without the services of highly competent workers because the latter cannot accept a job where they would be deprived of unemployment insurance benefits if they ever had to leave their job.