

## PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner):** Notice of motion No. 4 in the name of the hon. member for Ottawa-Vanier (Mr. Gauthier).

**Mr. Goodale:** Mr. Speaker, I believe there is general consensus to proceed with notice of motion No. 12, standing in the name of the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrestall), which is the resumption of debate at this stage.

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● (1700)

[Translation]

### UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

#### SUGGESTED AMENDMENT TO PROVIDE BENEFITS TO ADOPTIVE PARENTS

The House resumed, from November 22, 1976, consideration of the motion of Mr. Forrestall:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should give consideration to the advisability of introducing legislation to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act to provide benefits to the adoptive parent of an infant, similar to the maternity benefits now provided to workers who are unemployed due to pregnancy.

**Mr. Arthur Portelance (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time we have raised this issue of paying unemployment benefits to adoptive parents. It has been under review by the Unemployment Insurance Commission for nearly five years. This issue has several aspects. For example, let us talk about the concept of adoption in society. There used to be a lot of children for adoption. Now there are fewer. More than ever single mothers are likely to keep their child. Contraceptives are more sophisticated and more widely acceptable. There are much fewer unwanted children available for an increasing number of adoptive parents to be. Let us consider also the possibility of a single parent adopting a child. Some 10 or 15 years ago that was unthinkable. Nowadays it is done much more frequently.

However, social values alone must not be considered. The phenomenon of adoption itself is being altered. Nowadays children's aid societies encourage the adoption of older children. It often happens that those children have physical and emotional behaviour problems. This is why the needs of those children and adoptive parents are really different. The development is carried on.

In this new world of adoption, it is probably true to say that adoptive families have an adequate income. The adoption agencies carefully select a family and the annual income is an important criterion. Thus most adoptive families have an adequate annual income. The necessity of providing some financial assistance can be reconsidered.

### *Unemployment Insurance Act*

We cannot rule out the possibility of extending benefits to adoptive parents without considering the objective of the unemployment insurance scheme. It is indeed an insurance. A temporary income is provided to any individual who has lost an insurable job. During that time, the individual must actively look for some employment except when unable to work due to illness or pregnancy. Thus the unemployment insurance plan provides interim assistance to workers who lose their jobs unintentionally, who are able to work and who are looking for a job, or to workers who are not physically able to work for a while.

Let us consider this definition in the light of problems which face the adoptive parent. For example, is the fact of adopting a child reason for being unemployed and unable to find a job? I think the answer is no. Being able to work and being available for this purpose are the two main points of the unemployment insurance legislation. The adoptive parent may meet both requirements. For example, if the adopted child needs the constant care of an adoptive parent and if this parent is obviously able to work but not available under the provisions of the unemployment insurance legislation, the adoptive parent who retired from the labour force is physically able to work but not available.

Furthermore, a mother who has a child and who receives unemployment allowances is considered as physically unable to work. Consequently, if the adoptive parent is not available to work, he or she is not eligible for benefits under the unemployment insurance plan. Both principles of ability and availability enable to define clearly the eligibility for unemployment insurance benefits.

By giving benefits to the adoptive parents, however commendable in principle, we would somehow pay people who are able to work but who left the labour force of their own free will. This has nothing to do with the uncontrollable physical reasons I mentioned earlier. When they make their application for adoption, the parents are clearly made aware of the infant's needs. It may be necessary for one parent to stay home. If both parents work when they file their application, they voluntarily decide that one of them will stop working to stay home.

If the government were considering extending benefit eligibility to adoptive parents, it would create a precedent which would undermine the very principles of unemployment insurance. Anyone capable of working but unavailable for reasons other than those related to the labour market could take advantage of the system. To push the argument further, someone could advocate excellent reasons to say that he is unavailable for work and, consequently, he could be entitled to unemployment insurance benefits by deciding that he is not available.

I do not want in any way to discredit children adoption, quite the contrary. As I said earlier, adoption plays a primary role in finding a home for orphans or disadvantaged children or orphans. This is an opportunity to experience the joy of parenthood for those who cannot bear children or decide not to have any for reasons of their own. The question put before the