

to harmonize with the practice in the United States. We were told in the committee that, with the exception of the United States, we will be the only industrialized country in the world to have an unemployment insurance system to which the government does not contribute.

● (1450)

The argument is advanced that one of the reasons for this change is to harmonize with the United States. That may be the case, but the original, more fundamental reason for government participation was the necessity of the government to share the burden, to ensure that the system was national in scope and that it was not threatened by the wishes of employers who had in the past expressed their concern and, indeed, apprehension about the richness of the unemployment insurance system in Canada. So the amendment proposed by the committee asks the government to stay in, not for the full cost but for 50 per cent. I think it is a good amendment.

The other amendment to which I would draw attention is the one relating to fishermen. It is an important amendment. Honourable senators understand that at the present time the Government of Canada pays the full net cost of fishermen's benefits. It is paid out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund. The benefit/premium ratio for benefits for fishermen is 13 to 1. The benefit/premium ratio generally is 1.3 to 1. The justification for the government's support of fishermen's benefits is that it is an income support program. No doubt the program was included in the unemployment insurance system because it provided a convenient delivery mechanism for fishermen's benefits. Other employers and employees pay nothing. The benefits are paid by the Government of Canada because it is an income support program. I believe that is the case today. Certainly, when you have that variation in premium/benefit ratios, it gives you some reason to think.

When I looked at the parent act I was struck by the fact that the section introduced in 1971 relating to fishermen's benefits had a very odd characteristic—namely, that fishermen's benefits could be ended by proclamation and that any regulation affecting fishermen's benefits could be passed by the Governor in Council. In fact, the system itself could be ended by the Governor in Council. As I mentioned earlier, I wondered why Parliament had ever permitted that provision. Can honourable senators imagine a law that would permit the government of the day to eliminate crop insurance in the West? It would be unthinkable. No government should have that authority. However, the government of the day in 1971 obtained that authority from Parliament on the ground, as we are told, that it was a purely transitional section, that the government was busily preparing plans for a new system and it was, therefore, only a short-term item. In fact, we had one of the—

**Senator Barootes:** A Liberal majority did that!

**Senator MacEachen:** I am quite prepared to acknowledge that point. That subsection, which was originally introduced in the 1971 Unemployment Insurance Act, was intended to record the transitional nature of section 130 of the act, "until the plans being developed to protect self-employed fishermen

against the uncertainties inherent in the primary fishing industry are ready for implementation," according to the 1970 white paper on unemployment insurance, at page 11.

We all know the history. Fishermen's benefits have remained tucked away in the Unemployment Insurance Act. They have been a constant target of the bureaucrats. Every time a minister wanted to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act it was proposed that something be done about the fishermen's benefits provision. Anyone who has been in cabinet as long as I was will know that. It was always a target, and it is still a target.

If the provisions of Bill C-21 are implemented, that provision becomes a sitting duck.

**Senator Roblin:** It doesn't change anything; it was always a sitting duck.

**Senator MacEachen:** Senator Roblin has said that it was always a sitting duck. I agree, but there was one important difference: The government could say, "Employer, be quiet. We're paying the shot on behalf of the general taxpayer." If this amendment is accepted, however, the government can no longer say that, and the question will be raised, "Why should the auto workers in Windsor pay for an income support program for the fishermen in Atlantic Canada? Why should we finance these benefits?" It is inevitable. In the report a person who writes for *The Financial Post* is quoted as saying something to the effect, "Now is the time to bring in something different to replace this program, including finding jobs for these fishermen in other parts of Canada." Those of us who are from Atlantic Canada understand what that means.

In the amendment now before the Senate we are saying, "Look, any regulation affecting fishermen's benefits and changing them should be tabled in Parliament." If a number of members of the House of Commons or of the Senate find danger in these changes—for example, say, benefits are reduced—it ought to be debated and voted upon in Parliament. The government could still make regulations, but Parliament would have to approve, for example, a measure to reduce drastically benefits for fishermen.

The timing of Bill C-22 is awful. When this provision was included, I do not think the government was expecting that all hell would break loose in the Atlantic fishery. At a time when we are faced with fish plant closures, declining stocks, bewilderment in Newfoundland and other parts of the Atlantic provinces, the government is saying, "We intend to withdraw income support for the fishermen."

**Senator Perrault:** Shame!

**Senator Roblin:** We are not saying that!

**Senator MacEachen:** "We intend to withdraw government income support for the fishermen and transfer the burden to employers and employees." I do not think that we should allow that to happen. This is a very important amendment.

**Senator Asselin:** Tell us where we will get the money.

● (1500)

**Senator MacEachen:** I believe that the Senate has a real opportunity to strike a warning signal to say that we are not