

Unemployment Insurance Act

perhaps some \$500 million to the fund, the kind of ensuing hardship which would be extracted by those who would be faced with a 14-week requirement I do not think any Member of the House would want to impose upon that particular segment of Canadian workers.

Therefore, I would ask for support in that particular amendment to extend the ten-week to 14-week variable entrance requirement for another two years at which time, perhaps, the House of Commons and Senate would be in a position to re-examine the whole structure of the unemployment insurance system and be prepared to make longer term amendments and reformulations of the Act.

The second major amendment contained in the Bill clarifies the Commission's authority to establish special regulations for Canada's fishermen. This particular requirement on the Act was first initiated in 1957. Fishermen, particularly self-employed fishermen, have a very special place in the unemployment insurance system. While self-employed people are not normally eligible for benefits, we have had to develop unique rules for fishermen, taking into account the seasonal nature of their work. They comprise a category of workers that is quite unique in our country.

These special regulations have been called into doubt as a result of the March 24 decision by the Supreme Court in the Vicky Silk case. While the Supreme Court upheld the appeal of the Federal Court decision, it ruled that regulations restricting the qualifying period for fishermen are in conflict with provisions of Section 146 of the Unemployment Insurance Act and therefore ultra vires. Essentially, it said that we have no right to treat fishermen differently from any other group, despite the seasonal nature of their work. It would affect some 35,000 fishermen, with particular impact in areas of the Atlantic Provinces, Quebec and the West Coast. What the amendment does is simply to reaffirm and strengthen the power of the Commission to make special regulations and in effect, restores our power to undertake the kind of requirements we place under the Act for fishermen to receive benefits.

The proposed amendment would promote stability of the fishing industry by enabling us to put into effect many of the key recommendations contained in the Kirby Task Force Report relating to the fisheries industry across Canada. The changes would also directly affect the ability of inland fishermen and other winter fishermen by allowing them to become eligible for benefits as well, consistent with their fishing season, which will come as great news for fishermen on the Great Lakes system and in my own area of the Prairies.

I want to make it clear that the Task Force recommendations could not be implemented under the provision of the order of the Supreme Court. The amendments that we are now introducing into the House will allow us to continue the power to implement the special requirements outlined by the Kirby Task Force.

● (1130)

We will also be introducing the rights of claimants to deal with some other special problems identified in the Kirby Report, such as the right of claimants to build boats while

drawing benefits and new benefit levels based on the best ten weeks of earnings in fishing. That is a key requirement of the Kirby Task Force. I know it is a recommendation that will be largely supported by the fishing community across Canada. The amendments in this area, therefore, will encourage increased stability of the fishing industry by improving income protection and permitting the recommendations of the Kirby Task Force which were meant to rationalize the industry.

The third set of amendments propose to strengthen the regulatory power granted to the Commission in dealing with workers on annual contracts but with recurring time off. Categories of workers to fall under this definition are most obviously school teachers but they also include marine captains, navigational pilots and some professional athletes.

Once again, we were faced with a Federal Court decision which indicated that its interpretation of the present Act would require us to pay benefits to teachers on their off season, for example, even though they are being paid a full annual contract by their school boards. I think Members would recognize that this would essentially create a double system of benefits and would cost the unemployment insurance system somewhere between \$300 million and \$400 million alone. Therefore, we are asking for clarification of the right of the Commission to make regulations to ensure that that Federal Court interpretation would not provide the requirement for teachers to have that particular permission of payment even though they are under a particular contract of service. I would welcome Members of the House giving their support to this particular amendment so that we can clarify the Act and the law in this particular judicial decision.

That essentially sums up the contents of the Bill as it is presently presented to the House. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I also hope to introduce several amendments related to maternity and adoptive parents benefits. We would hope to be in a position to introduce these amendments at the Committee stage, and with the introduction of this Bill I think we are in a good position to do that.

I chose this approach because it was obviously essential the Act be passed by the June 4 date so the relevant sunset clauses that apply to the other amendments would not come into play. At the same time I want to express my own appreciation to Members of the opposition Parties who have indicated they are prepared to give quick passage to this Bill so that we may introduce the changes to the maternity benefits provision. I think this speaks to the consensus on the importance of both these issues as well as to a level of co-operation that Members have personally given me. I appreciate their gesture in this matter and I know many Canadian women will applaud this particular act by both sides of the House in bringing these amendments forward.

The particular amendments that we are introducing are to those sections which have been recognized as being inequitable