

*Supply—Labour*

have the good wishes of parliament as a whole and of the people of this country.

Likewise I wish to join with the hon. member for Hamilton West and the hon. member for Cape Breton South in saying that, despite all the efforts that have been made by the departmental officials to explain to us the reason for the discrimination against married women under the Unemployment Insurance Act, I still think it is a form of discrimination. There have been some improvements and some lessening in the discrimination since the regulation was first made, but I hope these representations will likewise be listened to and studied by the officials in the Department of Labour.

I come back to what I said at the start. Despite the satisfaction the minister and the officials may feel with respect to their legislation and their arrangements generally, I am glad we have this assurance that the whole field of labour matters is to be studied. I trust that these things which have been discussed tonight will be included in that study.

Amongst the items which I feel should be studied, and one to which I give high priority, is the question of the unemployment insurance benefit rates. As is now fairly generally known, the amount of money in the unemployment insurance fund is now approaching the billion dollar mark. As it approaches that mark, pressures develop for some change to be made. On the one side there are those who think the right move to make is to reduce the premiums and allow the fund to fall a bit in that way. Personally I do not think that would be a good move at all. I believe a good case is made out by those who contend that the unemployment insurance fund is now overfunded and that the time has come for what might be called a dividend to be paid to those who in the last decade have been responsible for overfunding that fund. Surely the most reasonable, most sensible way in which to pay what might be called a premium or a dividend would be to increase the amount of the benefit.

There is of course an argument as to the need for a higher rate of benefit, because of the cost of living; but it is also quite obvious now, with the fund as large as it is, that it is possible to increase the rate of that benefit. I know that a number of years ago if one had suggested a rate of unemployment benefit higher than what we now have, there were those who would have thought that that was a matter of subsidizing idleness, but we have gotten away from that now. We know in the terms of the quotation I read from the labour publication not long ago

that labour is not asking for subsidized idleness. Labour wants to make its contribution to the production of wealth in this country; but having played its part in the production of that wealth, it feels that it is just as much entitled to security as is industry and management itself.

Therefore, Mr. Chairman, I urge very strongly upon the officials of the Department of Labour, upon the unemployment insurance commission, upon the government, a very thorough study of this question of the need for increasing the unemployment insurance benefit and the possibility of doing it in view of the very large amount that is now in the unemployment insurance fund.

The hon. member for Cape Breton South referred to the fact that the views of labour generally are well known to the government because of the annual presentations that are made to the cabinet by the various labour conferences. If time permitted, it would be valuable to put on the record again some of the points that have been made in these briefs. I simply draw attention to the fact that they have urged very strongly that consideration be given to a national health insurance program and to a program of sickness benefits.

Hon. members have heard these words fall from our lips a good many times during the course of this session, indeed a good many times during the course of this parliament. But I suggest to hon. members that they will continue to hear from us about these matters until they are achieved. Again I suggest that we are not asking for something for nothing; we are not asking for gifts out of thin air. Rather we are asking that we appropriate part of the wealth that the workers of this country help to produce for this desirable and well-deserved social purpose.

I have no intention of using the labour estimates, Mr. Chairman, for the purpose of developing another speech on health insurance. You have already done me the honour of saying that you have read one of them; but I do draw to the attention of the Minister of Labour and the officials in that department the fact that this rates very high with the working people of this country as the next step that certainly needs to be taken, and as the next step which the workers who produce so much wealth in this country deserve to have taken.

I shall content myself with just one other matter about which I should like to say a word or two. I was quite interested in learning some time ago of a very interesting and important convention which was adopted at Geneva on June 28 last year by the international labour conference of which Canada is