problem, very simply stated, is that mothers of adopted children, particularly when those children are infants, are not accorded the same flexibility within the unemployment insurance structure as are natural mothers. We give an extended period of grace to natural mothers who can take their leave entirely before the birth, and perhaps entirely afterwards. In any event, the parent who brings home an adopted infant does not have the same flexibility, the same access to benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act that natural mothers do, and this seems somewhat unfair. So I raise this matter for the specific purpose of drawing attention to what I consider to be an omission in the act. At best it was an omission when we were going through the amendments to the act a few years ago, and at worst it has been described as unfair and somewhat discriminatory in nature.

Private member's motions very frequently, like most other motions and private bills introduced by members, stem from correspondence with constituents and with many others throughout Canada concerned with what they consider to be a serious failing in a particular piece of legislation. In this case, my motion stems from questions asked of me as to why those Canadians who are unable to bear children are discriminated against, and why, if we are to assume that an adopted child coming into a home requires as much love and attention as a child that comes into a home with its natural parent, adoptive parents are not entitled to the same assistance under the UIC program as are natural parents.

At present, a working parent who decides to adopt must use his or her annual leave without pay to allow time to make the proper adjustments before taking home a new member of the family, and certainly in the days and immediate weeks after the arrival of the child, particularly an infant, there is a need to make adjustments to make the child feel welcomed and loved. Some say this is merely a sacrifice which adoptive parents are willing to make and that the fact that in 1971 amendments were made to the Unemployment Insurance Act to protect workers whose earnings were interrupted by pregnancy really is irrelevant. It seems to me that it is relevant because the omission discriminates against one group of parents. The couple adopting a child consider themselves just as much parents as are the natural parents. I stand here as the proud father of two adopted children whom I could not love more. I am not speaking for myself now, because I do not think I will adopt any more children.

In January of this year I wrote to the then minister responsible for the Unemployment Insurance Commission and received a reply from his departmental assistant in which he attempted to justify the government's stance on the ground of the differing voluntary and involuntary nature of adoption and pregnancy. Let me quote the crux of his argument: it reads:

> The payment of benefits to major-attachment claimants who have incurred an interruption of earnings due to sickness or pregnancy, is in recognition of the principle that these conditions, generally involuntary, cause a claimant to be incapable of work. As a generality, the adoptive parents cannot be said to have incurred an involuntary condition which renders him or her incapable of work, as the adoption was, in fact, an act at the discretion of the parents and, under these circumstances, it is not possible to consider the granting of benefits.

[Mr. Forrestall.]

That statement, I think, reeks with bureaucratic idiocy. That might have been the case 10, 15, 20 or 30 years ago when we did not know what the pill was. Today in Canada, I suggest, pregnancy is fairly accidental in some respects, but by and large Canadian families in western society plan their families. So I cannot see the validity of the argument put forward by the official of the department. It seems to me that with the lowering number of children available in Canada for adoption, adopting a child is about as much out of the control of willing couples seeking to establish a family as is pregnancy.

You might put in your name and wait for years before the opportunity to bring a child into your home occurs. So while it is a deliberate act of love—indeed, those with adopted children will tell you, particularly after they have watched their children grow up, as I have, that it is a very selfish thing to do because of the great love that flows from these children to the parents—to argue that adopting is deliberate and pregnancy is accidental, and to use that argument to refuse to extend benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act to prospective parents of adoptive children, is nonsense.

I am not really talking about the eight-year old or the 15 or 18-year old child, nor am I talking about the three or four-year old child, although I think it is sometimes necessary to require time for their adjustment. I am speaking specifically about infants a week old up to, say, one year old. There is a school of thought with regard to any age that you would specify in connection with this type of adjustment. In this context I am talking about infants who require the presence of a mother. Given the character and nature of the lives of young men and women in Canada today, a prospective adoptive mother might be an employee of the Department of External Affairs and might have gone to China for a week or ten days during which time an opportunity for adoption might come up. The father would then have to fill that role, because if the prospective parents had been waiting for six months, for a year or for five years, they would certainly not want to miss the opportunity to proceed with the adoption, nor indeed should they.

• (1710)

But what does the father do? He has no benefit; he has no recourse. He either has to do it by way of leave of absence, or without pay. If he has a generous employer, perhaps some other arrangement can be worked out; but the point is that adoption is not a matter of picking up a telephone and calling. It is beyond the control of the couple seeking to adopt, so to that degree I suppose the word "accidental" could be used in connection with timing.

Speaking with respect to fairness and common sense, I suppose we should be realistic about the present omission in the act. I would not argue, as I attempted to point out, that the adoptive parents should be eligible for the same full fifteen weeks of benefits because, of course, the mother does not carry the child. Perhaps a more reasonable time might be seven or eight weeks, but I do not know. However, I do believe that we should recognize the special needs and problems parents have when adopting a child in terms of providing the care, attention