

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

would be an injustice to Canadians who participate in the development and enrichment of our country.

In this fast changing society in which we live, the working force of this nation needs protection from loss of jobs and this new unemployment insurance act helps Canadians in the event that changes have to be made in their work pattern. Many Canadians during the past few years have found that in this machine age many jobs have been eliminated and, therefore, in the transition period of retraining for a new job some form of income protection for all Canadians is needed. Unemployment insurance in the past has helped immensely during this change period, and therefore this new bill is most welcome. In my opinion, all Canadians, including the self-employed, should have protection and I sincerely hope that ways and means can be found to make this plan truly universal.

No government likes unemployment or inflation, but history has proven that we have high and low points in our economy and, therefore, we must have some kind of income protection during those low points. This new unemployment insurance act will help many Canadians during the trying days of sickness and unemployment and, in my opinion, it is a desirable piece of legislation. I congratulate the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) for looking ahead and providing the kind of income protection that all Canadians require.

**Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) made it clear yesterday that, generally speaking, members of this party welcome this first complete rewrite of the Unemployment Insurance Act since 1955, while indicating also that there are some parts of it we would like to see changed in a way which would lead to an improvement. It is not my intention, Mr. Speaker, to attempt to cover the same ground that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre dealt with last night, but rather to deal with a couple of particular aspects of the whole question of the application and administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act which I feel are pertinent to this debate.

In view of one or two remarks made by the hon. member for Dauphin (Mr. Ritchie), I would like to suggest that his opinion that this was welfare legislation rather than insurance legislation indicated a very misleading appraisal of the intent of the bill. I suppose one could indulge in semantics by saying that any kind of insurance plan is welfare legislation because essentially it is a matter of a group of people sharing the risk of the individual suffering a mishap or disability. I would assume from what the hon. member for Dauphin said that he will be opposing this bill at the conclusion of second reading, and I will be interested to see whether he follows his remarks with his vote.

I should like to make one further reference to his remarks, Mr. Speaker. He suggested that the overwhelming number of witnesses appearing before the committee were opposed to the bill. He argued, therefore, that the bill must be basically wrong. I think his remarks would be much more illuminating had he taken the time to list

[Mr. Turner (London East).]

the type of witness who appeared before the committee to register opposition. I think it would be clearly revealed from the record that most of the witnesses expressing opposition were from the elements of our society most concerned with extracting their pound of flesh from the working people of this country, either by avoiding paying any increases in wages or by getting it from the workers in their capacity as consumers. I was very concerned that the greater number of the witnesses who appeared before the committee represented such an imbalance of opinion in this country. I am glad to note that the members of the standing committee which dealt with the white paper did not yield to the pressures of vested interests.

When we were considering changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act in 1955, I can remember saying in this House that I should like to see the day when all workers in Canada who had made one premium payment into the fund would be qualified for benefits. This goal is not achieved by this bill, but I mention it because the hon. member for Dauphin suggested rather sneeringly that since a person could be eligible after an attachment of only eight weeks to the labour force this was a welfare measure.

I should like to address myself to one particular aspect of the bill to which the minister made reference in his opening speech, Mr. Speaker. I refer to the stated intention of the government, which is long standing, and the stated intention in the bill as it is before us, that sooner or later coverage of fishermen under the Unemployment Insurance Act will be discontinued. The minister said that the coverage will continue until it is replaced by something else. This is certainly what the bill proposes. The minister suggested that it will be replaced with a suitable plan, but he did not say to whom it would be suitable nor did he give any indication what the nature of the plan might be. In considering this bill, we are faced with a situation where we are in effect asking the fishermen of Canada to buy a pig in a poke. They do not have any idea what may be brought forward as a replacement for the coverage they now enjoy.

● (4:10 p.m.)

There have been some rumours emanating from the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry (Mr. Davis) that there may be some form of catch insurance. It has been rumoured that this might be covered by a payment of something like 7½ per cent of the gross value of the fisherman's catch. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no official statement from either the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) or the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry as to what may be in store for the fishermen as an alternative to unemployment insurance. This House should not give approval to the passage of this bill until we have some definite indication as to what the alternative will be for the fishermen. On the other hand, we could amend this bill to incorporate benefits for the fishermen under the plan on a permanent basis.

When I directed a question to the minister, he gave his assurance that coverage will continue until there is a replacement. I reported this to the fishermen in my constituency. I said I accepted the minister's word at face