

from the notion of simply maternity leave, that is, the right of the woman to benefits so that she may take time off in the event of the birth of a child, and a moving towards the principle that both parents have a responsibility to parent children and both have a right to have time off around the birth of a child in order to care adequately for that child.

The Government, in extending unemployment insurance benefits to adoptive parents, is doing more for adoptive parents now than they do for natural parents. It was our intention, Mr. Speaker, to introduce an amendment today which would call upon the Government to make those unemployment insurance benefits which are available to natural parents, not only available to the mother, but to either the mother or the father, within the limits of the benefits which are presently there in the legislation. This is to make the legislation more flexible.

This kind of a change would not cost the Government significantly more than it is costing them presently to administer unemployment insurance. However, it would be an incremental step towards recognizing the principle of parental a moving away from strictly maternity leave to parental leave. That, Mr. Speaker, is an important principle. However, the Government should treat natural parents at least as well as it now proposes to treat adoptive parents.

This was the amendment which we wanted to introduce with regard to maternity benefits, and I would hope that the Government would co-operate to see that that amendment could be introduced and that the Official Opposition would extend the same co-operation. We are now saying, with respect to adoptive parents, that either the male or the female member of the family could receive unemployment insurance benefits. Therefore I say, why not do that for natural parents as well? It will not cost a great deal of extra money. It is just a matter of allowing for some more flexibility.

We welcome these changes with regard to maternity benefits. We welcome the fact that these benefits are being extended to adoptive parents. This is long overdue. We are happy to co-operate in the effort to have that done, Mr. Speaker.

I would like, however, to put this matter into a broader context. How does Canada compare with respect to the provision of maternity benefits with other countries? I will give some examples. In Sweden, maternity and paternity leave extends for nine months with 90 per cent of salary. This can be divided between either parent. In France they have the right to 16 weeks' paid maternity leave at 90 per cent of regular earnings. In West Germany, workers are entitled to 100 per cent of regular earnings for 14 weeks. In Italy, women workers have the right to 20 weeks' maternity leave at 8 per cent of regular earnings. In Canada, Mr. Speaker, we have 15 weeks at 60 per cent of earnings.

Therefore, there are other western industrialized countries which provide a greater measure of support to the family in the event of the birth of a child. There are other countries which have provided a more adequate system of maternity and paternity leave.

Unemployment Insurance Act

What I am doing today, Mr. Speaker, is first of all calling upon the Government to recognize the principle of parental leave, that is, that a family has both a mother and a father, and the Government should recognize that principle. It has already recognized it with respect to adoptive parents in the legislation before us. It must also recognize it in terms of natural parents. That would at least be a recognition of the principle.

In the long term we should make a commitment to work towards an adequate system of parental leave. In terms of working towards an adequate system of parental leave, which some other countries have already achieved, I would like to say that I know there would be objections about the cost. Some people who would oppose that would draw pictures of this costing an enormous amount of money. However we treat families, however we treat the birth of a child, there is a cost involved. It is a question of whether we should have measures which allow for nurturing in order to create healthy and full families. If we choose not to provide adequate support for families, Mr. Speaker, we may pay for it further down the road in terms of family break-up, alcoholism, and crime. Everyone knows that it costs an enormous amount of money to keep in prison people who come from troubled families and who lead troubled lives.

So it really comes down to a choice, Mr. Speaker, of whether we want to take preventive measures or rehabilitative measures, or whether we just want to have people suffer. The long-term costs of developing an adequate system of parental leave is going to be paid for one way or the other. Other countries seem to have done a better job in terms of parental leave. We should choose preventive measures rather than rehabilitative measures.

I would call upon the Government to make a commitment to work towards an adequate system of parental leave in this country, and I would call upon it today to accept our amendment which would allow for the equal treatment of natural parents along with adoptive parents as it affects maternity benefits in the existing legislation.

There is some progress in this legislation. We welcome it and that is why we are co-operating. However, I would like to point out, Mr. Speaker, that while we are moving forward, there are also some fears afoot that, in terms of unemployment insurance, we might again be moving backwards. I am thinking now, Mr. Speaker, of farm workers. Farm workers have fought for a system which would allow them to collect unemployment insurance the way other people can collect unemployment insurance. The Government has moved toward changes in regulations which would actually make it possible for farm workers to collect their unemployment insurance. There were administrative changes. There are groups in the country, Mr. Speaker, financial groups and some farm organizations, which are objecting to the changes which the Government brought in and who are lobbying the Government to backtrack on this move towards a greater equality for farm workers, to make it impossible for them to collect unemployment insurance. Today I call upon the Government to stick to