

I would like to ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he can ensure this House that he will not appeal the decision of the Federal Court and, also, that he will introduce as soon as possible amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act so that fathers benefit from parental leaves and that, at the same time, mothers keep the benefit of maternity leaves.

[English]

Mr. Benno Friesen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the judgment was made two days ago. I think the Member would agree that the Government ought to give a studied response rather than a spontaneous one. I hope she would agree with that.

REQUEST THAT COURT DECISION NOT BE APPEALED

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, there is nothing to study. The issue has been studied by several parliamentary committees, including an all-Party committee which recommended more than two years ago that parental leave be granted to the fathers. Frankly, when the Federal Court of Canada speaks, I think the Government should listen.

Will the Acting Minister assure the House today that he will not appeal this decision? If he does appeal this decision, he is flying in the face of the Constitution and the Charter of Rights. Will he not ask the Minister of Employment and Immigration to proceed immediately with a new law to recognize parental benefits for fathers as well as maternity benefits for mothers? It is as simple as that.

Mr. Benno Friesen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the committee may have studied the subject but it has not studied the judgment. I think the Member owes it to us to do that.

REQUEST THAT UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT BE AMENDED

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. It also concerns parental leave which we believe is a vital component of child care.

I think we all welcome the decision of the Federal Court that natural fathers should be eligible for parental benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act, just as adoptive fathers are, but also the confirmation that maternity benefits have a different purpose and therefore the position of the father must not deprive the natural mother of maternity benefits.

In view of this important decision, when will the Government introduce amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act to offer a separate period of parental leave benefits so that fathers may have the opportunity of caring for an infant following the maternity leave period?

Mr. Benno Friesen (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, for once the

Member for Hamilton East beat the Member to the question and did a little better.

Oral Questions

PARENTAL LEAVE BENEFITS

Ms. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I expect you agree that that was a completely insulting response.

Mr. Speaker: I would ask the Hon. Member to put her question, please.

Ms. Mitchell: My supplementary question is directed to the Minister of National Health and Welfare who, I hope, has some concern about parental leave as part of a child care package. Does he agree with most of the women's groups across the country who feel that extending parental leave benefits to fathers is desirable, but are also quite firm that this should be supplementary to maternity benefits because mothers need a recuperative period after giving birth to a child? Will the Minister please respond?

Hon. Jake Epp (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, Members will recall that changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act were introduced by the former Minister of Employment and Immigration. The Government showed direct action in respect to adjusting the Act to modern realities.

Second, in respect to changing the Unemployment Insurance Act, I think the Hon. Member should recognize, as the Parliamentary Secretary has also indicated, that if any changes take place it would be appropriate for the Minister to make those changes and those announcements.

* * *

ADMINISTRATION OF JUSTICE

CHARLES NG—UNITED STATES' REQUEST FOR EXTRADITION

Mr. Gordon Taylor (Bow River): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Justice. Charles Ng is nearing the end of his four and a half year sentence in Canada for shoplifting and attempted murder. The Canada-U.S. extradition treaty permits, with the consent of the Attorney General, a prisoner to be extradited before the full sentence has been completed. Therefore, is the Hon. Minister taking steps now to send this criminal back to the United States where he is wanted for alleged serious crimes?

Hon. Ray Hnatyshyn (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I thank the Hon. Member for his question. The fact is that the United States Government has requested the extradition of Mr. Ng, pursuant to the extradition treaty between our countries. He has been arrested pursuant to this request. The matter has come before the courts in Alberta for a hearing.