

Unemployment Insurance Act

● (1805)

I would like to point out that Unemployment Insurance officials have been considering the problem for ten years, and during that time, Members on all sides of the House have regularly pointed out to the Minister of Employment and Immigration that adoption has become a specific phenomenon in our society.

However, I think we must be particularly careful when we consider parents who are going to adopt. I think the Department is having trouble at this point in properly defining various criteria that would make adopting parents eligible. For instance, there is an increasing tendency among unmarried mothers to keep their babies instead of giving them up to the Children's Aid. This is a new development. Before, it was much easier to adopt children because being an unmarried mother was socially more or less unacceptable, while today, we are seeing more and more single parent families, and it is becoming increasingly difficult for couples to adopt a child. As a result, there are fewer children available for adoption, while the number of people who want to adopt is rising. Orphanages are gradually disappearing.

Today, Mr. Speaker, we are seeing a shift in certain social attitudes, to the point that even single individuals are being considered as adoptive parents and do, in fact, adopt children. This would have been unthinkable a few years ago, while today, it is no longer the exception, since single people may adopt children. The profile of adoption has changed considerably over the years. People are adopting older children who may be suffering from physical or emotional problems. Such children and the parents who adopt them have specific needs, and it is important that they should be defined in legislation, because we need a set of criteria that will govern the subsequent implementation of the legislation and its regulations.

We must consider children who are passed from one family to another and are suffering from a lack of security and a lack of love and human warmth. Many of these children have serious behavioral problems which require special and constant attention. In addition, the people who are now considering an adoption have different expectations than those of the preceding generation. The same applies to children liable to be adopted.

We do not find such a definition in the Bill nor the scope of its enforcement. This is what I find difficult. As I said earlier, in the Explanatory Note to his Bill, the Hon. Member says and I quote:

An adopting parent should be entitled to benefits equivalent to pregnancy benefits considering that problems faced in adoption are as great as or greater than those occurring during pregnancy.

As I said earlier, the Unemployment Insurance Commission and the minister responsible for the administration of the Unemployment Insurance Act have been considering the problem for well over a decade due to the difficulty to delineate the scope of the legislation.

There is one other important issue, Mr. Speaker, i.e. the adopting family must comply with certain standards. Thus we should make sure that the couple is truly stable and that adopting parents will be able to face difficult situations, because the mere taking care of children should not be confused with an actually responsible and legal adoption. We see an ever increasing number of families who assume the responsibility of children without gaining their legal custody or actually adopting them. Now this Bill should be more specific on that subject.

People who are considering adoption must, in accordance with the requirements set forth by the adoption agencies, have a reasonable annual income since it is often required that one of the parents should leave his or her job during a period which could extend up to six months. Such a standard leads us to further consider possibility of providing some financial aid to those people, especially in the case of a two-income family. Moreover, the purpose of the unemployment insurance program is to provide with temporary assistance people who lose insurable jobs. We should make a distinction between an unemployment insurance scheme and social measures.

I believe however that some important matters must be cleared up in this respect. On the other hand, it has been established that most pregnant women work until one or two weeks before giving birth and receive maternity benefits during the weeks following the birth or births. It is therefore not very likely that most of these women could not go back to work until 17 weeks after the birth of their child. This is an important point with regard to the bill introduced by the Hon. Member. It is not that the principle itself is bad, but the Hon. Member tends to confuse a social measure with the Unemployment Insurance Act itself, which states that a woman must have at least 20 weeks of insurable employment to be eligible for pregnancy benefits on leaving her job, while the Hon. Member wants an adopting parent to be entitled to unemployment benefits. I imagine that the Hon. Member means people who are employed. Should benefits be paid to an adopting parent if the child is five days, two weeks or six months old? It is possible to adopt three, four and five year old children, but the bill does not make any distinction between cases.

Another point should be made. Not only has the Department been reviewing this problem for some time, but the Minister concerned, Mr. Axworthy, has made known his intention to speed up a review of all problems related to adopting parents. As I said earlier, everyone has been considering this problem for ten years, but Mr. Axworthy has promised to speed up the review—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. This is the second time that the Hon. Member has called the Minister of Employment and Immigration by his name. He should always refer to the Minister by his portfolio or his constituency.