

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

are engaged in productive enterprise. They fix up cars, make suits and the like. This may be done under a system where they return to the institution at night instead of going to the friendly local tavern to take advantage of that atmosphere. This system involves work and it gives a little dignity to these people who, for the most part, have none. For these reasons, I hope the minister will indicate during his reply on second reading that he intends to commence studying this proposal, and I am very hopeful that something will result from the suggestions I have made this afternoon.

**Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway):** Mr. Speaker, this bill is of very great interest to a great many people in my riding, indeed to a great many people in the Vancouver area and in the province of British Columbia. These people, being British Columbians, are inclined to concentrate on the features which fall short, even before they consider the good things because they know the evils and bitter results of unemployment. These people want me to make it perfectly clear that they do not consider this bill as being a cure for unemployment. They want it made abundantly clear to the people in this House, and in this part of Canada, that there is a wide sector in this country which will be affected by this bill only in a marginal way. A great number of people will not be covered or looked after by it. It is not the perfect umbrella for all of those in the working force caught out in the rain of unemployment. It has shortcomings which the committee will be dealing with as they did during the consideration of the white paper.

Recently I had an opportunity of meeting with a large number of representatives from various labour unions in the Vancouver area. They emphasized that the two-week waiting period was much too long, and that this waiting period worked out to three weeks under certain circumstances. And construction workers in many cases must establish two qualifying periods each year. As a result, the waiting period for them is often closer to five or six weeks during the course of the year.

These representatives asked me also to point out the lack of a definition of earnings as one of the shortcomings. They feel it is unfortunate that a definition of earnings is not in the bill but is to be left to regulation. They feel that earnings should not include what they may be able to pick up casually during this waiting period, or what they might obtain in some other way. They feel that the definition of earnings ought to be very lenient and broad.

These representatives do not like the 4 per cent unemployment threshold upon which the government assumes the burden of unemployment insurance. They feel that if the government accepts the figure of 4 per cent before assuming responsibility this will become the acceptable minimum rate of unemployment. The unions in my part of the country, and I believe all across Canada, do not feel that a 4 per cent level of unemployment is acceptable.

On the other hand, they and I believe that this bill is an improvement over the present one in many areas. A

[Mr. McCleave.]

great many people believe that if anyone can save this government from going down the drain it is the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey), and that by bringing forward this piece of legislation he may do a lot in that direction. That is because the minister has shown some conception of the conditions working people are up against when faced with interruption of income.

My colleague, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has gone over the major points of the bill very thoroughly. There are only two features of it I wish to deal with in detail. Our colleagues who are members of the committee will go into all the points I have mentioned as well as a great many others. I should like to refer to that part having to do with the inclusion of benefits for sickness and maternity.

● (3:20 p.m.)

As members of this House are aware, I have been trying for the past three sessions to introduce a bill which would handle the question of maternity benefits and the allied question of maternity leave. I believe when the minister gets around to his second piece of legislation concerning labour standards we will then have, with the provision in the unemployment insurance bill, what I was seeking to accomplish in my private member's bill which could not be received. As a matter of fact, because one member of our group last evening opposed the inclusion of maternity benefits in this legislation, I wish to make it abundantly clear that my colleague from Winnipeg North Centre and I have spoken out very clearly in favour of the inclusion of maternity benefits in the unemployment insurance legislation. As proof of this I should like to read what I said on November 3, 1970 when I spoke on my maternity leave bill which the House very kindly permitted me to introduce, having first of all eliminated the money provision which will now be looked after under this proposed legislation:

The great value of the unemployment insurance proposals is the fact that during her 15 weeks of absence due to pregnancy the woman will receive two-thirds of her previous earnings. I should very much like to have been able to bring in a similar proposal in this bill, but the rules did not permit me to do so. However, I shall content myself with congratulating the minister and supporting his proposal fully.

I wish to reiterate that today. I believe the minister is to be congratulated for having brought in the maternity benefit provisions in this legislation. I know it was not easy for him to do so because there were many people—employers' representatives—who appeared before the committee when the white paper was under discussion who tried their level best to have this provision removed from the legislation. It might be that there is a better way in which to bring in maternity benefit legislation. But in the absence of such proposals, I would not want to miss the opportunity we have to include it in this legislation.

I should like to say this is a good provision. It has been long anticipated and desired by women. The minister, when speaking on the 19th of April a few days ago, stated the case very clearly and eloquently. He stated it