

Unemployment Insurance Act

That budget is considered to have grown very fast, and it is very large at the present time. There is just too much money being paid out for too little productivity. The amount of money being paid out is high enough, but the loss of productivity is even more pronounced.

Without being the least bit partisan, it has to be mentioned that if the government has been pulled into line, part of the credit should go to its own backbenchers. Certainly the official opposition has traditionally taken a very stern, tough, clear stand on UIC payments, particularly abuses and disincentives, although lately in times of suddenly much greater unemployment it seems to have taken a more conciliatory stand, which makes life a little confusing around here.

I give credit to the New Democratic Party for its stand on unemployment insurance benefits and other social benefits. If rather one-sided about favouring these payments, the NDP has certainly been consistent. It certainly has not switched its position in any way at all. It is consistent, and we know where it stands.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. Philbrook: We have a few problems. One is basically a misunderstanding of the character and purpose of this social program. Another one is the search for a proper vehicle for all our financial support needs as they come up. This bill brings to our attention a very real need. It is small but real. There is a temptation to use something like UIC as a catch-all if we cannot work anything else out in a logical way. Another problem is the timing of Bill C-27, the main purpose of which, as I understand it, is to go the opposite way, to pull in the reins on the UIC program, to rationalize and to bring some measure of control to this valuable program so that it is not discredited, even to the point of bringing it down to the original plan it was supposed to be.

To put it very frankly, we need to check abuses and disincentives, and people from the Maritimes, including the hon. member who proposed this motion, the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East, will certainly appreciate that because this is of concern to the people of the Maritimes, which now have a high unemployment rate.

I apologize to the House for talking for so long, but I think we need a real social welfare program for something like adoption, not the unemployment insurance program. That is just not the right program. That program already has too much pressure on it.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his allotted time has expired.

Mr. S. Victor Railton (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the fact that this motion has behind it an excellent intention. It was brought forward because of the character of its proposer and its seconder. They are generous people who are trying to find, through the Unemployment Insurance Act, some means of giving special benefits to a special small group. However, it

[Mr. Philbrook.]

should be pointed out that, as most of the other speakers have mentioned, the Unemployment Insurance Act was brought in for a certain purpose. That purpose must be adhered to; otherwise, we will need a completely new act.

The government has handled unemployment insurance in a very imaginative way in Canada.

Mr. Alexander: In what way?

Mr. Railton: I always enjoy talking to the hon. member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), but I cannot do it directly right now.

Canada has been singled out by other countries as a leader in trying to deal with the tragic problem of unemployment. United States Senator Hubert Humphrey recently wrote to the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Cullen).

The letter said that the United States is very fortunate to have a neighbour to the north which not only faces many of the problems of its own economy but which has the leadership and foresight to take innovative approaches to these problems.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Railton: The letter goes on to say that young people in the United States will be very fortunate indeed if the United States merely follows that lead and establishes the same kinds of programs there. I ask the hon. member for Hamilton West, what do you think of that?

Mr. Alexander: Mr. Speaker, is the hon. member asking a question?

Mr. Railton: That was a rhetorical question which does not require an answer.

I would like to re-emphasize that the basic purpose of the unemployment insurance program is to provide income maintenance where an interruption of earnings has occurred, and to do so in a manner which ensures that the worker will return to the labour force as soon as possible. My colleague from Brampton identified the needs of recipients of unemployment insurance, and he went into the question of how to fulfil those needs.

In 1971 the government recognized the need to cover interruptions of earnings relating to maternity, and that the provision of adequate maternity legislation was of the utmost importance in Canada where over one-third of the active labour force is female and where approximately one in six workers is a married woman. Because of the plight of many thousands of women who had little or no protection when unemployed due to pregnancy, in 1971 the government included in the Unemployment Insurance Act provisions to provide up to 15 weeks of unemployment insurance maternity benefits to women with at least 20 weeks of insurable employment.

Furthermore, the payment of benefits to major attachment claimants who have incurred an interruption of earnings due to pregnancy is a recognition of the principle that this condition