

Unemployment Insurance Act

if for no other, this bill is worthy of early passage.

The reason given in 1955, and the reason given since for the exclusion of farm workers from the benefits of the act, is that their work is largely of a seasonal nature. It is true that many Canadian farms do not require full time, year round employees, though large numbers are employed on that basis. However, I think any one who has talked to farmers, and people interested in engaging in farm work, recognizes the fact that one of the problems in securing an adequate number of workers is that people who are engaged in other forms of insurable employment, at other seasons of the year, try to avoid accepting farm employment because, during any period of employment on a farm, they will be outside the coverage of the Unemployment Insurance Act, and thus lose potential benefits under it.

We are discussing this bill at a time of high employment and when the most recent reports indicate that the amount of money in the unemployment insurance fund is on the rise. It is a time when skilled workers are in short supply, and this situation is striking quite a blow at the agricultural economy of the country. It is for this reason I feel the house should give second reading to the bill and refer it to the appropriate committee where, if minor changes are required to fit it in with the existing Unemployment Insurance Act, they can be implemented there and reported back to the house for favourable consideration.

● (5:30 p.m.)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Caouette (Villeneuve): Mr. Speaker, I shall make only a few comments on the motion for second reading of Bill No. 59, an Act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act (Agricultural Employees' Coverage).

Here is the preamble of this bill:

Whereas, under the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act, employment in agriculture is an employment that is not, nor has been, an insurable employment; and

Whereas, since the coming into force in 1941 of The Unemployment Insurance Act, 1940, economic and social pressures and technological changes have reduced the number and increased the size of farm units and have swollen the migration of excess farm population to urban areas; and

In the farming areas, and to give only one example, more specifically, in my own area, we have mining centres, mining towns, and surrounding such towns are quite a large

number of farming parishes where the settlers must, during the winter months, work either in the woods or in mines and come back to their farms for the few summer months to try to earn something from them.

While those people are employed in lumbering or mining, they pay unemployment insurance and when they leave their jobs they apply to the unemployment insurance office to get benefits, only to be refused benefits because they are told that their main occupation is agriculture.

Mr. Speaker, everybody knows that agriculture is centred mainly in eastern Canada. In our province of Quebec more particularly, agriculture brings in approximately \$1200 to \$1500 a year to our farmers and settlers, many of whom earn less than \$1300. It is not with only six or seven cows that a farmer or a settler can support a family of seven, eight or ten children on the farm.

I believe the amendment proposed in Bill No. C-59 reasonably complies with the requirements and particularly with justice, for farmers and farm workers.

The bill goes on as follows:

Whereas, increasing mechanization and the consolidation of smaller farm units for more efficient operation, the low levels of farm income compared to the income of the non-agricultural labour force, the high capital cost of entering modern farming, and the attraction of urban amenities, turn farm youth from farming as a family way of life.

It is a fact. We find that young people are leaving the farm for the cities. Go into any farm riding nowadays, whether it be my riding or the riding of Lotbinière, and ask a young man of 23 or 25: Are you interested in taking over from your father on the farm? In 95 per cent of the cases, the young people will reply: We are not interested in working 15 hours a day the year round on the farm for an income of \$1,200 to \$1,300.

This is where the young farmers, the youth exodus toward urban centres is apparent. The young go away and leave the farm. Why? Because farms no longer supply a livelihood to the farmers. That is the reason. The young do not want to carry on. Why? Because they have seen their fathers toil for years, for 10, 15, 20, 25 years. They are not interested in taking over their father's place on the farm precisely because the farm no longer offers the security it formerly did.

The bill goes on:

Whereas, the number of workers with the new abilities and managerial skills requisite for seasonal or permanent employment on the modernized farm