

Unemployment Insurance Act

who supported my previous motions. However difficulties were encountered by the government and by other people concerned in seeing to it that the Unemployment Insurance Act would cover the seasonal farm labourer.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to a submission presented to the standing committee on industrial relations by the executive council of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce in 1959 when the committee was dealing with Bill No. C-43, to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. They said:

We are of the view that before an increase in rates is imposed, a number of areas of drain should be examined; alternative methods of financing should be reviewed and the question of coverage be studied.

This is the chapter in the submission which deals with areas of drain, financing and coverage. It continues:

The drain on the fund caused by the coverage of fishermen will, according to the unemployment insurance advisory committee, total in a full year \$10 million.

We note that the same committee submitted to the government that the loss to the fund—

They were discussing the unemployment insurance fund—

—caused by extending benefits to fishermen should be paid from sources other than regular contributions. This is seeking to plug the hole after it has been made. It is the executive council's submission that this group should never have been covered and, indeed, it notes in the hearings of the standing committee on industrial relations in 1955 a memorandum, dated May 16, 1955 in which such statements as the following were incorporated:—

"The conclusion still seems inescapable that unemployment insurance is no answer to the fishermen's problems... To bring the fishermen under the act on such a basis would be misleading and unfair."

Despite this memorandum, the fishermen were covered under the act.

This is one reason why there were so many committees set up since 1952 to see whether it would be possible to bring seasonal farm labourers under the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act. As early as 1952 a committee was set up and, although it did not recommend that unemployed farm labourers should be covered, it came out with recommendations which were later implemented. For instance, farm labourers who worked on farms where they raise chickens or horses were included, but the rest of the seasonally employed people were not covered.

I also note with pleasure the remarks of the Minister of Labour to the effect that studies have been conducted by his department concerning the seasonal farm labourer. To reach some conclusion, in 1961 the department set up a committee known as the Gill committee. The Gill committee report is not

[Mr. Rapp.]

available at the present time, but it is known that the matter was considered before that and it was said that consideration should be given to a voluntary scheme. In other words, this would be where the farmer and farm labourer were in agreement to pay into the Unemployment Insurance Act, and thus seasonal workers could receive coverage.

In 1959 an intergovernmental committee was established by the unemployment insurance commission to make a survey of the possible coverage of farm labourers. The committee included representatives of the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Finance, the department of insurance, the dominion bureau of statistics and the unemployment insurance commission. In February, 1960 this committee submitted its report, emphasized the fact that the problems were serious and suggested possible schemes which would to some extent meet these problems. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Starr) also obtained the views of the minister of agriculture of that time and the latter asked if consideration could be given to a voluntary scheme, as had been suggested in the report of the committee in 1952. It was there suggested that a farm operator could elect whether or not to cover his employees. The committee made further studies and surveys in 1960 and found great difficulty in arriving at even an approximate estimate of the cost of the scheme. This is where the situation stands at the present time.

There are certain difficulties, Mr. Speaker, in the way of this question of unemployment insurance for farm workers and the implementation of such a proposal, but the fact remains that this group of people is in a desperate position. This is the only group of labour not covered by unemployment insurance. Many of these seasonal farm labourers have established residence in the area where they work and have difficulty moving their families into areas where they could perhaps obtain work in industries. Also, at the present time it is sometimes very difficult for unskilled labourers to obtain employment in an industrial area.

I would suggest, Mr. Speaker, that the house give serious consideration to this problem. If it is not possible to have seasonal farm labourers brought under the Unemployment Insurance Act, consideration should at least be given to working out a regulation which would bring them under the act on a volunteer basis. Many farmers in the west are in desperate need of skilled workers, because at the present time their farms are highly mechanized and it takes a skilled operator to handle expensive combines and tractors. Then, due to the fact that they are only going to be employed during the season, many of these people are not interested in this type of