

present act pregnant women are generally disqualified for benefits six weeks before and after confinement, the unemployment insurance scheme for the 'seventies should fill that gap and authorize payment to those whose income had been interrupted due to sickness and/or pregnancy. Realizing that the government had this intention, I examined the statute, together with the bill presented earlier by the hon. member, Bill C-160, I believe, in the second session of the 28th Parliament. I also read a booklet prepared by the Canadian Department of Labour, entitled "Maternity Leave Policies". The book states, on page one:

Maternity leave linked with security of employment is a relatively new addition in most provinces to the expanding list of employment benefits in Canada.

As yet, as I have indicated, it is the subject of legislation in only two provinces—British Columbia, where the original Maternity Protection Act dates from 1921, and New Brunswick which added legislation on this subject to provincial labour standards requirements in 1964. Its growing acceptance is no doubt related to the steady increase in the participation of married women in the work force which we have experienced particularly in the last decade. Although much of this increase is due to the return of married women to employment when their children reach school age, between 1957 and 1967 the participation rate of women of childbearing age rose from 47 per cent to 57 per cent in the 20-24 age group and from 26 per cent to 34 per cent in the 25-34 age group. The report makes it clear that an attempt was being made to give a descriptive summary of the results without attempting to draw conclusions, and concedes that a number of areas which might warrant more probing in depth had been revealed. In my view, the bill now before us is indicative that the conclusion is warranted by the statistics presented in this booklet.

I was interested to note that although, according to the report, "The most important provision required as a condition of eligibility for maternity leave is length of service with the employer", the hon. member's bill is silent on this aspect. The government's proposition is that in a pregnancy situation benefits will cover a 15 week period and will be available to anyone whose earnings cease through pregnancy or sickness, and who has been in the labour force for 20 weeks or more during the previous 52 weeks. If this bill were to be voted on today, I submit the hon. member might wish to give it more credibility by placing some similar requirement in her own bill. It is perhaps understandable that the hon. member should not include such a clause in her bill, because the report by the Department of Labour states, and I quote:

The length of service required for eligibility varies not only between industry groups but within the industry group and between office and non-office employees, so that no clear pattern emerges. A majority of office employees in ten industry groups are required to have three to six months prior service, and in seven industry groups from seven to twelve months service. For non-office employees the period required tends to be shorter. In all but three industry groups a majority of non-office employees must have six months service or less and in half of these the requirement is three months. There does not appear to be any relationship between the length of service required and the size

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of the reporting unit or the presence or absence of a collective agreement.

Mr. Speaker, I think I have covered the points I wish to examine. I wish to congratulate the hon. member for having brought this bill forward. I would have welcomed a few more statistics as to the number of women likely to be covered by legislation of this kind, but no doubt other speakers will deal with this aspect.

Mr. Robert McCleave (Halifax-East Hants): First of all, I should like to support the principle of this bill. Second, I should like to assure the hon. sponsor that I do not do so from any Victorian attitude. I suspect the hon. member who preceded me did, because it seemed me there lurked within the framework of his speech the awful notion that somewhere, somehow, a dewy-eyed young lady would present herself for work and, having duly registered for employment, would declare her pregnancy to the company doctor. This seemed to be a possibility which in itself was enough to cause grave doubts as to the virtue of the bill.

I see no problem about this at all. The woman is very much a part of the working force today, and the woman carries with her the possibility of pregnancy. So, may I say to the hon. lady who is sponsoring this bill that when she looks down her nose at the possibility that it might wind up before the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee she might be far better off in my tender embraces than she would in the embraces of some hon. members opposite who help constitute the Committee on Manpower and Immigration. I think the justice committee, especially the Tory members thereof, could do her a great deal more justice.

● (5:30 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, we should never fall into the school of thought that the last speaker mentioned where, as in New Brunswick, you can do one of two things to obtain your desserts under the legislation. As I understood his reading of the act, you can produce a child or you can produce a medical certificate. I would suggest to our colleague that she should bring her measure before the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee, where we would clearly have that matter straightened out.

Mrs. MacInnis: Hear, hear!

Mr. McCleave: I am glad to hear that she agrees with me. I do not know why we should have this God-awful emphasis placed upon statistics in respect of this problem. Whether it happens to 1 per cent of the female working population, or 99 per cent, surely is not the reason for this Parliament to take action: the fact that it happens at all—and this is one of the very natural things that will happen to a woman employee—should be sufficient reason for it to engage our attention. It is not the extent of the problem as it affects womenkind as a group that is important. The effect this has upon any woman who is working and finds herself in this position should