

of the child in the long run and our responsibility as members of society to the next generation.

In the same report the commission put forward the idea of a parenthood insurance scheme whereby a long-term strategy would enable both men and women to participate in the paid labour force while, at the same time, fulfilling their responsibilities as parents. There would be a nine months "child leave" with 75 per cent of regular income, and so on.

The province of Quebec has legislation whereby that provincial government pays expectant mothers a benefit during the first two weeks of their maternity leave while waiting to receive the unemployment insurance cheques to which they are entitled. This measure could be adopted by other provinces, including my province of Ontario, since it is fully and squarely within the realm of the power of provincial governments in the field of social security.

There are weaknesses in the present act. Something can be done about them. One has to do with disentanglement because of labour disputes. During a strike by Air Canada last winter there were women who were due to go on maternity benefits. Once the strike began, they were disqualified because of that development. They were denied benefits until the strike was resolved. Evidently the strike was beyond the control of the workers in that company. That matter should be redressed for the benefit of the mother and the child.

There are certain aspects of the Canada Labour Code that should be brought into line. These should be brought to the attention of interested members if this bill is given second reading and allowed to go to committee.

In conclusion, I want to put some figures on record. In 1974 the total number of women in the labour force was 3,276,000. In 1979 that figure jumped to 4,408,000. In 1974 the number of women in the labour force between ages 20 and 44, the child bearing years, was 1,968,000. Last year that figure increased by almost one million to 2,778,000, a substantial increase of 41 per cent.

I see that my time has expired. Before concluding I wish to thank all those who helped in the drafting of this bill and in gathering the necessary information.

● (1640)

Mr. Jim Hawkes (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak this afternoon as the member responsible in my party for matters affecting employment, and that includes the unemployment insurance measure before us.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Davenport (Mr. Caccia) for once again bringing the attention of the House to a continuing problem with a piece of legislation which was passed for the first time in 1971. It was a bad piece of legislation at that time, and it is a bad piece of legislation today. Considerable time has been spent by the House of Commons in trying to correct the legislation, and the hon. member opposite brings another illustration of its inadequacy to our attention today.

Maternity Benefits

One of the issues which the hon. member raised was that to qualify for maternity benefits under the Unemployment Insurance Act an applicant should be able to specify the exact date on which she became pregnant. Unless medical science has made advances of which I am unaware, I believe we have a somewhat elusive phenomenon here that one cannot prove, and therefore claimants experience problems when they go to unemployment insurance offices and attempt to establish their right to benefits. This speaks, I think, to the complexity of the unemployment insurance legislation and to the difficulties which are created for claimants across the country.

One of the remarkable features of the bill is the relative proportion of the premiums from employers, employees, and government contributions which today go into the administration of the act itself, not into the benefits, not into the support systems or to the men and women in this country who need that kind of support, but simply into the administration which is a consequence of a badly designed act, one which is difficult to administer.

I would like to bring it to the attention of the House that the government which was elected in this country in May of 1979 undertook as a matter of priority a complete review of the Unemployment Insurance Act. In mind were several principles. One of these was to introduce—reintroduce might perhaps be a more accurate term—and reinforce the use of basic insurance principles. The unemployment insurance fund was originally to be a form of insurance, not different from health or car insurance. Those who through no fault of their own found themselves unemployed would be entitled on an insurance basis to income support which might ride them over until they were able to secure employment again. That principle was abandoned in 1971 and there has been a continuing problem ever since.

The second important purpose of the review was to simplify the plan both for ease of administration and public understanding. Anybody who sits in this chamber representing a riding in this country can speak, I think, to the degree of public misunderstanding which cuts across this country. People do not understand the Unemployment Insurance Act. We have situations where people who live across the street from each other have different eligibility requirements, not different premiums but different eligibility requirements. Some have to work for ten weeks, while their neighbour, right across the street, has to work for 14 weeks before becoming eligible for benefits. Certainly, Mr. Speaker, that speaks to the complexity of the act and the high cost of administration attached to it.

In our review we set out to make the measure more cost-effective. I think this suggests the need which exists to direct the benefits of the measure to those who need them most.

As a new member of Parliament elected for the first time in May of 1979 and sitting in the previous Parliament, I found that on the first occasion our Standing Committee on Manpower and Immigration met to examine main estimates, it was brought to our attention that the Auditor General some two years previously had alerted the officials and the minister of manpower and immigration to the fact that some \$300 million