

Income Tax Act

date of each payment. These credits could also be carried forward for up to five years.

Eligible employees will be those registered at Canada Manpower Centres or Employment Centres with the general principle that they must have been unemployed and looking for work for at least the eight weeks before referral to the program. One of the objectives of the program is to encourage the hiring of people who are becoming discouraged as a result of their inability to obtain employment, and thus to help them regain their self-confidence. At the same time we wish to ensure that other employment opportunities have been adequately examined prior to referral to this program.

Eligible employment must last at least three months, and at the present time subsidization will not exceed nine months. The three- to nine-month period was chosen so that employees will be offered a sufficient period of employment to benefit in terms of skill development and work experience. At the same time, the period of subsidy must be long enough to be attractive to employers and thus ensure their active support. We feel a nine month maximum represents the best balance between these concerns and program costs. At the same time, the legislation provides for the flexibility of extending the maximum to 12 months if it is warranted.

No limit will be placed on the number of participants but the program will be targetted at a net annual revenue cost of about \$100 million. This, we feel, is capable of providing jobs for some 50,000 people per year.

The program will be introduced for a two-year period and will be effective no later than March 31, and hopefully on March 1 of this year.

Before closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the employment tax credit program represents a special, additional effort on the part of the federal government, over and above the many millions of dollars that are currently being spent on direct job creation. The program is a new and experimental approach to federal job creation. It will be closely monitored in order to determine its future as part of our employment policy. To be successful, the program requires an enthusiastic response from the private sector, an acknowledgment of the shared responsibility for providing jobs for those Canadians who have difficulty obtaining them.

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, in taking part in the debate on the second reading of Bill C-23 I should like first of all to clarify the position of the official opposition with respect to this measure.

As most hon. members are well aware, we have for some time been pressing the government to bring in employment tax credit legislation, and I am very pleased that the minister has at last reached the point of bringing down the bill presently before us. Nevertheless, in the course of my remarks I shall draw attention to the differences between Bill C-23 and the employment tax credit program we had hoped to see for the benefit of Canadians and especially of those who are out of work.

I cannot refrain from commenting on what I regard as an unforgivable lack of concern on the part of the government for the unemployment of this country. I really cannot understand why the government did not choose to give this bill priority yesterday. We in this party have indicated repeatedly during the question period that if it was the desire to bring in this bill we would give it passage in one day, subject, of course, to its being basically as represented. But this meant that we expected the Minister of Finance (Mr. Chrétien) to be in his place to explain the measure and accept questions during the committee of the whole stage. For reasons not clear to me, the government chose instead to bring in its Anti-Inflation Board patch-up bill yesterday and to proceed with Bill C-23 today. And now we are told that the Minister of Finance is too tied up at a conference to present the bill in this House on second reading and spend an hour of his time answering questions during the committee stage. I do not think this is a very good effort on behalf of the unemployed.

I turn, now, to another point. Yesterday the Minister of Finance stated in answer to a question put by my leader that this bill, if passed, would result in the program being in place "by March 1". There was no equivocation. Today we find the parliamentary secretary, who has been given a brief, written presumably by the public service, saying it will hopefully be in place by March 1. This is just not good enough. If we must ride along with a part-time Minister of Finance, the time has come when somebody within the government has got to exercise compassion for the unemployed and see that progress is made with pressing legislation, putting it into place so as to relieve the tragic consequences of unemployment.

Hon. members will recall that as long ago as the budget of the former minister of finance, the hon. member for Rosedale (Mr. Macdonald), on March 31, we stated in our response, that employment tax credits should be considered by the government and, hopefully, introduced. In October of last year before the start of the session, we again asked the government to bring in employment tax credits. On October 20 the Minister of Finance said he was setting aside \$100 million for such a purpose. These delays illustrate the dither and lack of confidence which exist in government circles. Not until three months later do we find such a bill before us.

● (1532)

Even today when we commence second reading and, we hope, go into committee of the whole to review the bill, the Minister of Finance is not in his place in the House. I mention this because we all know he is attending the conference of ministers of finance, but he knew that yesterday. Why did he not ask that the House business be changed to give priority to this bill so that he could be with us when the bill is passed? It could have been done yesterday. The administration, to which the parliamentary secretary referred, would have been put in motion by now to ensure that the new law is functioning by March 1 at the latest.