

Unemployment Insurance Act

and be treated the same as anybody else under the Unemployment Insurance Act who receives sickness benefits.

Finally, I want to say this about the Act. It has been reopened now to deal with these long overdue amendments and to deal with the sunset provisions which expire in a couple of days. We have to think about changing the Act to deal with the reality of the present situation. I have no hesitation in putting this on the record. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Etobicoke Centre (Mr. Wilson), put forward a proposal which I personally endorse. In this regard I cannot pretend to speak for my colleagues because it has not been discussed in my caucus.

In terms of the present recession and the scope and extent of the unemployment situation, we should think of extending the benefit period to deal with the long-term unemployed. We have the phenomenon now of a large number of Canadians who are classified as long-term unemployed. If my memory serves me correctly, there are just under a million Canadians who are now officially long-term unemployed. Many of these are accounted for in the 50,000 to 60,000 unemployment insurance exhaustees who come on to the statistical record every month.

My colleague put forward the proposal that we extend the benefit period to cope with long-term unemployment because it would be better to extend Unemployment Insurance benefits than to have the exhaustees humiliated by undergoing a means test when applying for welfare, half of which will be paid by the federal Government in any event under the Canada Assistance Plan. I support that provision. I believe it is one that under the present circumstances would find favour with my colleagues in the Official Opposition, although it is a proposal that has not been considered at this time by the Official Opposition.

In conclusion, I look forward to the comments of my colleague, the Hon. Member for Kingston and the Islands. She has provided leadership in many areas of the—I am trying to pay a compliment to the hon. lady and she persists in interrupting me. I am merely trying to say that she deserves recognition for the leadership she has provided.

• (1200)

For example, I remember that the very first act of the Conservative Government of 1979 was to bring in a Bill extending the spouse's allowance which had previously treated women unjustly and unfairly. That was the first act of the Conservative Government in which my hon. colleague from Kingston and the Islands was a distinguished Minister. Of course, as spokesperson on women's issues for the Official Opposition, she on many occasions has put forward her concerns with regard to the unjust provisions of the Bills as they deal with maternity benefits.

I would also like to point out that my colleague, the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), the distinguished Assistant Whip of this Party, brought before the House a Private Member's Bill that dealt with the unjust provision of the Act which failed to address the issue of eligibility for

unemployment insurance benefits under the maternity provisions of the Act for parents who adopt children.

As well, my colleague the Hon. Member for Simcoe North (Mr. Lewis) put forward a motion under Standing Order 43 a year or so ago calling for the Government to agree to change the Act and repeal Section 46 to provide the same treatment under the terms of the Act for adoptive parents as for parents who were entitled to maternity benefits. That motion, of course, did not achieve the required unanimous consent.

We agree, Mr. Speaker, to honour the commitment we made to the Government to deal with all provisions of this Bill today. I point out to my colleague, the Hon. Member for Winnipeg-St. James (Mr. Keeper), that we intend to hold him to the commitment that we made on the floor of the House to deal only with the Government's amendments. That is our understanding of the undertaking we made. It is also our understanding of the undertaking that was made by Members of the NDP. We intend to hold them to that undertaking and we hope that a satisfactory solution can be reached before we come to an impasse. God knows that we have little enough time left as it is to deal with these very important provisions in the Bill as we go into Committee of the Whole.

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg-St. James): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak on the Unemployment Insurance Act. I would like to begin with an overview of what the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act cover. We, of course, are supportive of the over-all thrust of this legislation, but in spite of the positive things that are contained in it, much more remains to be done.

This legislation, Mr. Speaker, deals with variable entrance requirements which would allow people to collect unemployment insurance with fewer qualifying weeks in regions of higher unemployment. It has become necessary for us to deal with this legislation because there is a sunset clause attached to this provision of the legislation. So that we do not jeopardize the unemployment insurance claims of these people, we of course support this provision.

The Bill also attempts to deal with something called the Silk case which has to do with unemployment insurance benefits for fishermen. While we in this Party see the need for unemployment insurance benefits for fishermen, we have heard very urgently and strongly felt concerns expressed by fishermen about the adequacy of the present unemployment insurance system as it affects fishermen. My colleague, the Hon. Member for Comox-Powell River (Mr. Skelly), will go into this matter in more detail later on today, Mr. Speaker, because the rights of fishermen to unemployment insurance benefits have not yet received adequate attention.

It is obviously necessary to have an unemployment insurance system for fishermen and this Bill does provide for that to continue, but a more equitable system is needed, a system that ensures that all fishermen will get the unemployment insurance benefits that they are entitled to. It is with this in mind, Mr. Speaker, that we prepared an amendment to the Bill before us regarding fishermen.