

There have been dramatic changes in adoption in society over the last several years. At one time the majority of adoptive children were infants and there was a large number of infants available for adoption. Now, changing social values have radically altered this pattern; birth control measures are more sophisticated and acceptable, and single mothers are more and more tending to keep their babies instead of putting them out for adoption. For these reasons there is no longer a large surplus of babies available for an insufficient number of prospective parents. Quite the reverse is true in many cases.

Social values on adoption are also changing in many ways. For example, it would have been virtually unheard of 10 or 15 years ago for a single parent to adopt a child. This is happening more and more in today's world. Children's Aid Societies are encouraging the adoption of older children. In many cases these are children with behavioural, psychological or physical problems. Their needs and the needs of their parents are therefore different from the needs of many adoptive parents in the past.

It is evident to anyone who has studied the area that there are circumstances in which adoptive parents will have more difficulty in caring for their new child than is the case with many newborn infants. It is not difficult to imagine, for example, the pressures in an adoptive family attempting to care for a child who has been bounced from one foster family to another, a child who lacks a sense of security, of love and of family warmth. There is no question that in many cases such adoptive children have serious psychological problems and that the new parents must provide continuous care and supervision which will require one or other of the parents to remain at home. Consequently, there may very well be income problems in the family, and it is here that Governments and social agencies must become involved.

One of the criteria, not necessarily the most important, in arriving at a decision on adoption, is the financial circumstances of the family unit. Just as important is the question of whether the needs of the particular child can be met in the family environment of the adopting family. Children's Aid Societies pay a great deal of attention to the suitability of the family. Some of the factors involved in their evaluation are that the marriage situation be a stable one, that adequate emotional stability and security be provided. Parents must demonstrate their ability to handle the problems which will arise in adoptive situations. They must show that they are emotionally able to accept a child and that they will be able to understand and deal with the child's problems and point of view. These are extremely important considerations. They are sometimes complicated by the issue of financial security.

The core of my concern here is not whether adoptive parents may need some form of support. Some will, others will not. I believe the issue for us to consider now is that if we agree in principle that adoptive parents in general should get some form of support through the UI program, then what is the best legislation this House should support to do it?

Unemployment Insurance Act

I believe that this Bill does not represent the best this House could legislate. Let me explain. In general, the specific provisions of this Bill display a lack of understanding of the principles underlying the current provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act. The qualifying period and entrance requirement proposed is too stringent, given what is now in effect for maternity claimants. Why should adoptive parents be subjected to considerably more restrictive requirements than natural parents? It may well be that, upon further study and consultation we would see fit to have substantially different requirements for adoptive parents. But it does seem inequitable, at first glance, to treat the two groups of claimants differently.

Other provisions of this Bill relate to the way in which benefits could be paid and the length of the benefit period. First, the Bill does not provide for a waiting period, and in doing so conflicts with the insurance character of the UI program. We must remember that the waiting period is comparable to a deductibility clause in a private insurance plan. And, clearly, if there is a waiting period for maternity benefits and if, as the explanatory note to the Bill says, "an adopting parent should be entitled to benefits equivalent to pregnancy benefits", then why should there not be a waiting period in the case of benefits for adoptive parents?

The Bill also proposes to pay benefits for only eight weeks after the adopted child starts to live with the new parents. Some years ago this House legislated that maternity benefits should be paid within a more flexible time frame. It has tended to endorse a more generous attitude to providing modern women with income protection that is commensurate with the critical social role they play in the welfare of future generations. Parents with adopted children play an equally important role. Any motion to provide them with UI benefits should therefore reflect a reasonable and studied attempt to provide comparable income protection. The principle of equity demands it. Any motion to provide them with UI benefits should therefore reflect a reasonable and studied attempt to provide comparable income protection. Furthermore, the maternity benefit provisions themselves have been subjected to detailed scrutiny over the past few years, and many interested groups have made sensible suggestions that would streamline UI maternity provisions and make them more equitable. The Government has been reviewing the provision of the current legislation with a view to proposing changes.

Legislation on benefits for adoptive parents should, therefore, be considered in the context of this review to ensure they are both equitable and consistent with current trends to modernize legislation so that it can provide temporary income protection to those who cannot work due to the initial demands of post-adoption or post-natal care.

Let me stress again that I am not disputing the validity and worth of paying benefits to adoptive parents. Adoption plays, we all know, a vital role in our society, in providing good homes for disadvantaged and parentless children. It also makes it possible for those who cannot have natural children, or choose not to have them for whatever reason, to experience the rewards of becoming parents.