

*Unemployment Insurance Act*

as we considered the bill, but I do not think that they differ from others of us. I think that they are subject to error and perhaps would respond to suggestions. Although I shall give them credit for excellent work in connection with preparing the bill and presenting information to us in the committee, I am not prepared to praise them without adding a word or two of caution or advice with regard to their actions. As I see it, the commission is in a rather independent position. It reports to the house through the minister, but it is not representing simply the government side of this matter. The fund that it administers is large in extent but is not composed only of taxes collected by the government; five-sixths of it is derived from contributions made by employers and employees. Hence the commission under no circumstances, in my opinion, should be presenting what on occasion appeared to me perhaps to be a government-appointed view. I believe the commission should present reports and make submissions to us that are marked more by independence than by an attempt to favour one side or the other in an argument.

Now I am going to deal with just two matters in that regard, one concerning the vexed question of married women and the clause that affects them in this bill, and the other with regard to the reduction in time from 51 weeks to 30. The hon. member for Hamilton West has touched on most points and made a very effective contribution during the course of the committee hearings, particularly in so far as women are concerned. I think it is important for the house to realize that the women within the labour force of this country are on the increase and important to recognize the fact, as the hon. member for Hamilton West pointed out, that not always are they given perhaps as full consideration as they should receive. In one of the reports given to us by the unemployment insurance commission, it was shown that of the insured population the married women had risen in number from 23.1 per cent just after the war to 33.9 per cent in 1954. That is, of the total number of women, taking in the insured population and those who are not insured, the percentage of married women in the labour force was about 35 per cent. Then when you look at it in the total, you find that in 1954 there were 849,152 women in that portion of the labour force that comes under this insurance measure, and of that number 287,863 were married.

The bill makes special mention of married women and the commission presented to us a brief concerning married women. Members of the committee considering this matter

argued that there appeared to be discrimination against married women in the brief that was presented and in the fact that there is in the act a clause referring specifically to them. When I heard the brief read, and read it again myself, I was of the opinion that the commission took, in the phrase used by someone earlier today, a negative rather than a positive position concerning married women, and put them in a rather poor light as being ones who were taking advantage of the fund. That is the impression that was left on my mind by the brief. Whether or not that was intended, I am not saying, but that was the impression left on my mind. In the brief I found that scattered examples were quoted here and there of married women who had apparently taken advantage of the act and the regulations, but I felt that the commission was generalizing from a very few examples, a practice which is dangerous in any circumstances. As a matter of fact they gave us no figures. They just made general statements as to what certain people had done. They mentioned stenographers quickly losing their ability to take shorthand, apparently after they married and some people who, after being married and then coming down to the unemployment insurance offices, appeared untidy. I think that was an unnecessary method of making an argument with regard to married women supposedly taking advantage of the act. I hope that in future the commission will present some of its arguments in different form.

In the committee I pointed out—and I think it is worth keeping in mind—the fact that we have been dependent in times of crisis on the work of women in the labour force. We are dependent upon them in wartime and we would not have had such success in production results in this country with regard to munitions and supplies of all kinds had it not been for the work of the women. Since the war the women have remained within the labour force in this country; a great many married women have remained within the labour force and their number seems to be on the increase. The fact that women become married and are obliged to withdraw temporarily from the labour force does not imply that they are not going to return to it or that their contribution in the past has not been effective or anything of that kind. But the impression left with me in considering this problem was that some discrimination was being considered in respect of married women.

I think the hon. member for Hamilton West was on firm ground when she pointed out that women should be more widely represented