

Unemployment Insurance Act

the bonus payments are deducted from the amount the adoptive parents get. This is grossly unfair and I do not believe it is the intention of the legislation, of the baby bonus system, or of the Canada Pension Plan. The situation ought to be corrected by means of an amendment to the National Health Act.

We have heard a lot about adopted children this afternoon. Many such children sometimes resent the use of the word "adopted". I rather like the word "chosen". They are chosen children. They are chosen in the true sense of the word. This feeling has stayed with me throughout all the years of my life ever since my parents explained to me how it came about that they had become my parents. Such parents have a choice, a choice which is never offered to those of naturally born children. Adoptive parents give their love and devotion freely to the child they have chosen. So it is a proud thing for an adopted child to say "I was chosen".

In making their choice, the prospective parents have a responsibility of course to look into all the aspects of what they are doing. Under the present system they may find themselves deprived of unemployment insurance benefits in certain circumstances. I do not believe, of course, that anyone who adopts a child in Canada will take into consideration, when making such a decision, the relatively small amount which is involved in losing unemployment insurance benefits for a period of five or six or even 25 weeks. That is not what is uppermost in the minds of parents who have decided to take into their home a child to raise and cherish. The hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East raised an interesting point concerning the circumstances in which an adoptive parent might not be home when the child arrives. Needless to say, it is highly unlikely that a natural mother would not be at home when the child arrived.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): She might be in the hospital.

Mr. Douglas (Bruce-Grey): There are, of course, circumstances in which the natural father might have to accept a great deal of extra responsibility once the mother and child have returned home. This brings up the question: ought such a situation to be covered by the unemployment insurance legislation? Suppose a mother and child return home and, due to medical reasons which could be explained much more ably by my hon. friend from Welland (Mr. Railton), the mother is confined for weeks or months, unable to take care of her baby, should we take into account the position of the father who is taking time off to provide the care which is required?

A question has been raised involving the ages of adopted children. Where do we draw the line? At what age does one say that a child is able to take care of itself while the mother is absent, for example, at her work or business? There are many variables to be considered, depending on the abilities of the particular child concerned. Mental or physical disability aside, one child of five or six years might be quite able to look after himself in certain circumstances while another child of eight or nine might not be able to do so, so serious thought must be

[Mr. Douglas (Bruce-Grey).]

given as to when the umbrella of unemployment insurance would cease to operate.

Primarily I wanted to put on record my thanks to the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East for having put this subject forward for discussion. I give my thanks as an adopted child to all parents in this great country of ours who have taken upon themselves the raising of a child, whether a family relation or purely a child that has been put up for adoption. They are the kind of people this country needs, and they have provided for many young men and women the type of upbringing that they were so much in need of. My thanks go to the hon. member and to the members of the House for bearing with me this evening.

● (1750)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Arthur Portelance (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Manpower and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I join also the hon. members who have spoken to congratulate the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East (Mr. Forrester) on his motion. I also want to congratulate him for having adopted two children; several other Canadian families are in the same situation and also deserve our congratulations. In that way, several young Canadians will happily benefit from family life which is often well deserved.

Mr. Speaker, the basic aim of the unemployment insurance act of 1971 was to ensure an income to those workers who, for reasons beyond anyone's control, are out of work, but who are capable of working and willing to do so, and who seek new employment. So, in 1971, the government recognized that it was necessary to cover interruptions in salary due to pregnancy and that adequate amendments should be made to the laws on maternity in Canada, one third of the workers being women and one out of six of them being married. Because of the fate of several thousand women who had little or no protection when they became unemployed because of pregnancy, the government saw to it that those workers should be entitled to 15 weeks of benefits provided they had at least 20 weeks to qualify them for maternity benefits.

[*English*]

Since their introduction maternity benefits have been made more flexible by providing up to 15 consecutive weeks of benefits within a period beginning as early as eight weeks before the expected week of confinement and ending as late as 17 weeks after the actual week of confinement. Before this, the 15 weeks of benefits were provided within rigidly defined boundaries: eight weeks prior to the expected week of confinement and up to six weeks after the week of confinement. The increased flexibility was in recognition of the differing needs of individual women. These changes also brought the UI maternity benefit period into line with existing provincial maternity leave provisions.

[*Translation*]

I also hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Unemployment Insurance Act can be further amended in the future to give the act as it