

*Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971*

for the coverage of fishermen in that part of the act which deals with the coverage of working people generally.

It is a matter of great regret to me that at this point, when we are moving much closer to universality in coverage of working people than many hon. members are prepared to accept, we should be taking a retrograde step toward depriving those who work in a basic industry from coverage when unemployed. In the various speeches which he has made at the report stage the minister has repeatedly emphasized his belief in the principle of universality. Yet this clause as it stands makes provision for fishermen to be denied coverage by a simple proclamation on the part of the Governor in Council.

The two clauses we seek to amend are redundant and unnecessary even within the context of the statement made by the government of its intentions with regard to a still undefined plan to provide certain benefits for fishermen. We all know that, procedurally speaking, should the government decide to bring in a bill as an alternative to the present unemployment insurance arrangements for fishermen it would simply have to include in that bill a clause asking the consent of Parliament to delete the section dealing with the coverage of fishermen in the existing act. So from a procedural viewpoint alone the provisions to which I object, and which are contained in the bill before us, are unnecessary.

The records of proceedings in this House give us some indication of the government's intention with respect to an alternative plan. Announcements were made by the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry (Mr. Davis) on more than one occasion. Up to a point one is prepared to accept with an open mind suggestions made by the government in this area, but I want to make it clear that at this stage we have no idea when the government is likely to bring forward this alternative plan or what the nature of the plan might be.

On April 22, when we were called upon to deal with a new unemployment insurance bill, I asked the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry whether he would bring his plan forward so that we might intelligently appraise the proposition and come to conclusions about it one way or the other. The minister replied that he would be glad to bring this matter forward as soon as it had received full consideration by the government. Apparently it has not yet received such consideration; we are still very much in the dark. On May 12, questions were addressed to the Minister of Labour (Mr. Mackasey) by the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate (Mr. Lundrigan) seeking information about this alternative plan. The Minister of Labour replied:

I think this promise has been made many times by the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry. The present plan provides coverage of fishermen in the same manner and on the same basis as in the past. I understand it is the intention of the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry to introduce some time in the indefinite future, I think he said, a plan that will be comparable and acceptable to the industry.

Whether or not it will gain acceptance by the industry is, of course, a matter of opinion. We do not know in what manner a determination will be made as to whether

[Mr. Barnett.]

or not it is acceptable to the industry. On May 19, a week later, the Minister of Fisheries and Forestry contradicted the statement made by his colleague the Minister of Labour. He said:

Mr. Speaker, as a point of clarification may I say I have never said this scheme must be acceptable to the fishermen. It has, of course, to be acceptable to my colleagues in the government and also to Parliament.

So there we have it. This is a scheme about which we know nothing, a scheme upon which up to now the government has reached no decision. Yet we are asked today to agree that fishermen can be taken out of the present unemployment insurance plan as a result of a simple proclamation by the Governor in Council whether or not any alternative plan which might be approved by the House is acceptable to them.

Certainly on the Pacific coast the fishermen do not consider this to be good enough. They feel that the time when we are extending the coverage and benefits of the plan is no time to be squeezing them out. I should like to return for a few minutes to the phrase used by the Minister of Labour, "The present plan provides coverage of fishermen in the same manner and on the same basis as in the past." What is in the mind of the government is obvious from the fact that they have placed arrangements for the coverage of fishermen in the part of the bill which is headed "Transitional and Repeal Provision."

I should like to call attention to the phrase "in the same manner . . . as in the past". This means that an unsatisfactory situation is to be perpetuated. It means that the silly approach which has consistently been taken when dealing with fishermen will be allowed to continue at least during the period in which they are left in limbo. Again, this is partly the reason I have put down amendments which say, in effect: We want the fishermen to be left in the plan. We want the commission, when the new act goes into effect, to take a realistic look at the principles in accordance with which fishermen have been covered. We do not want to leave the situation stagnant so that some of the stupidities that have developed as a result of the present regulations and arrangements are continued into the indefinite future.

● (3:40 p.m.)

I shall try to relate some of my remarks to what I believe has been a very unhappy history behind the move to cover fishermen under the unemployment insurance plan. Obviously, I cannot do it in the course of one speech on one afternoon in this House. However, when this clause was before the Standing Committee I did make some references to the discussions that took place when the last major overhaul of the Unemployment Insurance Act was made in 1955.

I urge members of the House to read the proceedings of the industrial relations committee when considering the Unemployment Insurance Act in 1955. Among other things they will find that a very unusual procedure developed whereby a minister not responsible for the bill came before the committee and made a special presentation on this subject along with his departmental officials.