

Unemployment Insurance Act

The same thing goes for seasonal workers. Many of our farmers need help when they are most busy, that is during six to eight weeks and very often for the whole summer season. They also need help for sowing time, hay harvesting and for the harvest season. They could employ workers for four to five months but since the answer is always the same "We cannot pay unemployment benefits", they have to employ men who are far from being helpful as competent farm hands. They have to entrust them with the operation of costly machinery. I am sure you know, Mr. Speaker, that the machinery farmers must use nowadays is getting to be more and more expensive. Farm workers have to be qualified when they operate machines worth \$2,000, \$3,000 and even \$4,000.

It is true, Mr. Speaker, that it would be most difficult to extend the provisions of the Unemployment Insurance Act to all farmers, but with agriculture's continued evolution, as I said a moment ago, if it is difficult now to find skilled labour, it will become increasingly difficult in a few years. It is therefore most essential to find a solution to those problems because in addition to giving assistance to farm labourers who hold seasonal employment, we will have to give assistance to those farmers needing skilled labour.

Such solution will be found in an extension of the provision of the Unemployment Insurance Act allowing for optional eligibility of farm labourers to unemployment insurance benefits.

Mr. Speaker, we are aware that the Gill commission will submit a report reflecting the submissions brought forward at the hearing by farmers' organizations across the country. In the light of this report, I believe the government may consider assistance to seasonal employees and farmers in need of farm labour.

Take the case of the Canadian fisherman who is entitled to unemployment benefits. The extension of the act in his case brought assistance to him. This government therefore contributed some degree of assistance to this Canadian worker. Now, the farmer who needs qualified and skilled labourers would appreciate the passage of the bill before us, and that is why I am pleased to support the motion of the hon. member for Humboldt-Melfort-Tisdale (Mr. Rapp).

Mr. Gerard Legare (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, I shall only take a few minutes because I would not wish to prevent the house from voting on the resolution now before us. On the other hand, I know that other members have expressed the wish to take part in this discussion, which makes me think that, even if I take only a few minutes, the house will not be called upon to vote on this resolution tonight.

I should like to congratulate the hon. member for Humboldt-Melfort-Tisdale (Mr. Rapp) for the steadfastness he has shown by coming back again this year with this resolution.

I believe that the house unanimously agrees with him when he states that the Unemployment Insurance Act should be amended so that the farm workers could benefit from it.

I was astonished to hear the hon. member for Kootenay West (Mr. Herridge) say he was surprised to see a member of the Liberal party support such a measure. I would remind him—it is unfortunate that he has left his seat, but I see him smoking his pipe behind the curtain—that the Unemployment Insurance Act was adopted by a Liberal government and that it was amended by a Liberal government so that the fishermen could benefit from it. It is also a Liberal government that, in 1957, studied what steps should be taken so that the agricultural workers could benefit from that measure that has been so beneficial to the country.

My hon. friend from Kootenay West should remember that all special measures which benefit the country today were implemented by a Liberal government. They are all progressive measures that were also improved through the years.

(Text):

Mr. Herridge: Who brought in the Unemployment Insurance Act?

(Translation):

Mr. Legare: The Liberal government instituted that act and had it adopted by parliament. Again a Liberal government amended it so that it would benefit the fishermen.

I remember that in 1957 a committee of the house studied the possibilities of changing the act so that our farming class could benefit from it.

I am sure, Mr. Speaker, that if the Liberal party had remained in power in 1957 and 1958, the farm people and the farm labourers today would benefit from such a beneficial measure which has rendered more services than any other.