

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

consider covering Members of Parliament. However, the problem here is in terms of defining an employer. An employer of a Member of Parliament does not exist in the same concrete sense as an employer does for other people who are on a payroll. But, Mr. Speaker, there is a precedent. When it came to the enactment of the Canada Pension Plan a special wording was adopted which had the effect of maintaining the tax exempt status of the contributions made by members to the Canada Pension Plan, and also in effect permitting the government of Canada to make its contribution as an employer for this particular group. I have had some discussions with public servants who are in charge of administering this area, and I do not think there is any insuperable difficulty in adopting the wording that was used for the Canada Pension Plan. This would call for an amendment at the committee stage, and I sincerely hope that hon. members who serve on the committee will give consideration to doing this.

I think the principle of universality is something that should be respected for all groups. I think that the moral example should be set by hon. members in this place. I think that the problem is of sufficient magnitude that it warrants a special amendment when we examine the legislation in committee.

In opening my remarks, Mr. Speaker, I said that the debate has revealed the extent of agreement much more than the committee proceedings would reveal. I think the agreement by members of all groups represented in the House on the general features of the legislation is something that stands out in the *Hansard* record, but there is no question that at the committee stage the usual careful examination clause by clause will be conducted by members of the standing committee to which the bill will be referred. I look forward to the opportunity of participating in at least some of the committee sessions at that time.

Mr. W. B. Nesbitt (Oxford): Mr. Speaker, on rising to make a few remarks on this bill I do not wish to repeat what some of my colleagues, both in my own group and in other groups, have said, nor do I intend to do so. However, I do wish to deal specifically with a few items. It has been said, and I generally agree, that there are some very good points in the minister's legislation. There are a few that are not so good, and there are quite a few that need a great deal of clarification, which I hope will come at the committee stage. I would like to bring a few of these to the attention of the minister and of his parliamentary secretary.

It was interesting to note during the debate, particularly this afternoon, the references to the principle of universality. I must say that in general terms I quite agree with it, but I must point out that the actuarial basis for unemployment insurance, as it was originally envisaged in the 1930's when it was first contemplated, has been widely departed from in the intervening years. I am not saying that it is not a good thing there has been a departure from this principle. From what I have been able to gather, most members of the House intend to support the bill on second reading, as do I. After certain explanations and clarifications, and perhaps even some

[Mr. Francis.]

amendments to improve the bill, we hope to be able to support it on third reading. Even if the bill has some bad features, one is faced with the situation of not wanting to throw out the baby with the bath water. We will cross that bridge when we come to it and hope that it will not be necessary to give other considerations to the matter.

● (3:50 p.m.)

The first thing I should like to deal with specifically, Mr. Speaker, is the question of administration. Even if legislation is perfect, in theory if not in practice, unless it is well administered and the purposes and objectives carried out, it is of no practical use. During the last couple of years the administration of the present act has deteriorated. I think the previous minister of labour and the present minister have been sold a bill of goods by some well meaning but unrealistic members of the public service. It is all very well for the minister and members of the government to say that they have a wonderful new way of administering the act, namely, by a computer in Belleville. That city is far removed from the industrial heart of the province, not that I have anything against the city, but this could cause endless delays in the payment of claims. No matter how many explanations are offered or how good the plan is supposed to be, the fact is that it does not work very well.

I have been a Member of Parliament for 19 years and until this new system came into effect I had not received more than one or two complaints a year regarding the payment of unemployment insurance claims. We warned the minister what would happen with the new system and our worst fears have been realized. There has been nothing but trouble. Just this morning I received nine letters of complaint from people who were not receiving payments. Fortunately, unemployment in my part of the country is somewhat less than it is elsewhere. I could spend a lot of time going into detail but I do not think it is necessary. I have sent certain suggestions privately to the minister and to other committees of the House. The fact is that the present system of administration, brought in a couple of years ago, simply does not work.

Offices in small, medium and fairly large industrial centres were closed in order to try to standardize claims, but unemployment insurance claims do not lend themselves to standardization, Mr. Speaker. Members of Parliament and civil servants are accustomed to filling out forms but even they sometimes make mistakes. People with language problems and Canadians born in this country but not as literate as they might be, experience difficulty in filling out forms and make mistakes. An incorrect form going through the computer can result in disqualification of the claim.

Then, there is the routine of having the claim reviewed. If the claimant does not live in one of the centres he may have to telephone or travel 50 or 60 miles to get information and clarification. These things annoy working people. The minister has promised to clear them up, and I think he has tried very hard, but it is like the legend of Hercules trying to clean out the Augean stables—an almost impossible task. The old system may have needed improvement but the new one, though it