

would be a "money bill" which must be introduced by a minister of the Crown and accompanied by the recommendation of the Governor General.

However, because there has been some considerable latitude given in the past, the Chair will, in this instance, enter a caveat as to the procedural acceptability of Bill C-205, an act to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971 (maternity benefits), since it infringes the financial initiative of the Crown, in the light of the scheme of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

Notice is now given, however, that members should accordingly govern their requests to the office of the law clerk and parliamentary counsel to draft such bills.

I intend to allow the debate to take place on this bill until such a debate comes to an end and then will rule on the acceptability of the bill.

Mr. Caccia: Mr. Speaker, I should like to thank you for your ruling and for permitting debate to take place on this bill. I appreciate the difficulty you have encountered in deciding whether it would be acceptable. I certainly appreciate your conclusion, and thank you for your permission to go ahead with the bill.

For the benefit of hon. members, may I ask you to cast your mind back to 1971 when the then Liberal government decided to include the concept of maternity benefits in unemployment insurance, despite strenuous opposition from several quarters.

We all thought that the idea of maternity protection for women in the labour force was good Liberal ideology and one with which a modern industrial state could come to grips and implement. The good Liberal policies of 1971 were like a good wine which needs time to settle and improve itself. Now, nine years later, it is becoming clear, and a number of national organizations have brought this to our attention, that changes are needed in order to improve what was rather radical and advanced thinking in social legislation.

● (1620)

Let me briefly illustrate for the benefit of members present what Bill C-205 intends to do.

In the existing legislation, which we propose to amend with this bill, ten of the first 20 weeks of pregnancy must coincide with the minimum 20 weeks of contributions. If a woman who is in the labour force has only nine or less weeks at work at the beginning of her pregnancy, she is disqualified even if she has worked 20 other weeks.

Second, we can take the case of a woman who is not eligible for maternity benefits, because of the description that I have just given, expecting a child and is unemployed. She cannot qualify for unemployment insurance in the period eight weeks before and six weeks after the birth of the child. In other words, within a period of 15 weeks, which happens to coincide with the birth of the child, that woman cannot draw unemployment benefits.

Maternity Benefits

Third, take the case of a woman who lives in the Atlantic provinces where she needs 15 weeks of contributions to qualify for unemployment insurance in general. But if she has contributed 16 weeks she will not qualify for maternity benefits because the law says that she has to have 20 weeks. This rule applies across the entire nation regardless of regional qualification for unemployment insurance benefits. She will not qualify for regular benefits for 15 weeks, again around the date of the birth of her child. That woman in the labour force is penalized twice—and I am using the word "penalized" in a very narrow sense—in relation to her colleagues in the labour force who may become unemployed for different reasons other than maternity.

Finally, let us take the existing case today. For every week that a woman is on unemployment insurance because of unemployment or sickness during the preceding year to her maternity, one week is deducted from her maternity benefits, if she qualifies. That means that if in the preceding year the woman has been covered for unemployment insurance purposes for five, ten or 15 weeks, these weeks are deducted from her total maternity benefits.

With these illustrations in the background, I suggest that Bill C-205 represents one small step in the direction of a more extensive maternity policy. It is really an effort to bring equality of access to unemployment insurance benefits. It is nothing more than that.

I would suggest also that in the 1980s and in an industrial society like ours we do have to develop an approach which will go well beyond the scope of Bill C-205. This bill before us somehow redresses imbalances. It attempts to establish certain equality and, as I mentioned earlier, access to benefits—nothing more than that. Certainly we do need more than that. That, of course, can only be done within the scope that is given to a government and to a minister in charge of this type of policy.

I would say in commending Bill C-205 that it is meant to bring parity in the treatment of working women, who apply for maternity benefits, in line with the treatment of others who apply for regular benefits. At the present time the requirements for maternity benefits are stricter than those for other benefits.

With this bill we are proposing to replace section 30(1) with a clause that will make maternity benefits available to pregnant women who have worked 20 weeks in the 52-week benefit period. At present, and I am going to repeat the illustration of a moment ago but in a different way, for a woman to be eligible for maternity benefits, the time when she becomes pregnant is crucial to whether or not she is eligible for benefits. She must have worked 20 weeks, like any other worker, but ten of those weeks must overlap with ten of the first 20 weeks of her pregnancy. I shall repeat that: a woman must have worked 20 weeks, like any other worker, but ten of those weeks must overlap the ten of the first 20 weeks of her pregnancy.

For instance, if a woman stopped working nine weeks after becoming pregnant, she would not be eligible for maternity benefits even though she would qualify for other benefits. This