

and anxious that the recommended changes be made. In consequence this bill is before us.

I do not deny that there are in this field great administrative problems. It is intended that contributions under the act as amended shall commence about the first of April 1957, the beginning of the next fiscal year, and that the benefits provided for will be available about the first of January 1958.

As I have intimated, the bill is a progressive measure, a step towards universality in unemployment insurance. The act as amended will cover more than 50,000 fishermen. There still remain, however, about a million workers, including those employed on farms, hunters, trappers, teachers, government employees, those working in public hospitals, and some domestics, who are not covered; so there is a considerable way to go yet. Though a plan is here formulated, it will take time to work out a detailed practical method of giving limited coverage to persons whose main occupation is fishing, including the self-employed, those who work on a share basis, and those employed by others.

As the act stands, for those engaged in fishing seasonal benefits only could be made available. This legislation will provide for collection of contributions from and on behalf of fishermen who are not employed for wages. So I am able to state emphatically that this will become the first instance in which self-employed groups are covered by insurance. It is anticipated—though at the moment I cannot speak on this point with too much authority—that the purchaser of the catch will be assumed to be the employer, and in the case of those who work on a shore basis the owner of the boat will be regarded as the employer. I would not try to teach a grandmother to suck eggs, and, looking about me in this chamber, I shall not do too much talking—for obvious reasons—about the fishing industry. It is carried on in a variety of ways in different parts of Canada. Thus, to meet all conditions, a very detailed and carefully drawn plan is required; but as I have said, it is expected that one will be worked out in time to permit contributions from fishermen to commence at the beginning of the next fiscal year. That will qualify them for benefits by January 1, 1958. That is all there is to the first amendment, except that the job of setting up a detailed plan will get under way. I am sure I share the views of this house that the Unemployment Insurance Commission will be able to work out a suitable plan. It has solved more difficult problems in the past and I am sure it will be able to deal with this one.

The second amendment arises in a curious way. Last year the act was completely overhauled and extensively revised. It was not then realized that it would impose stringent restrictions on the unemployed. That, of course, was not the intention. Everyone, including the officials of the department, was surprised by the practical results and there was considerable suffering, due to disqualification under the new act. It has been suggested that almost 90,000 claimants were disqualified, although about 90 per cent of them were able to draw seasonal benefits. The Government was quick to recognize the hardship that was caused and so this bill is being presented. I have used a considerable number of words, but what I am trying to say to this house is that we on the committee that dealt with the Unemployment Insurance Act last year pulled a boner, and it was a little too late to correct it. When we put the act into effect we found it did not do just what we thought it would do. The mistake is now being corrected.

The act that was passed last year brought on hardship, for it provided in effect that persons who become unemployed and claim benefits every year have to acquire 30 weekly contributions every year in order to qualify. Now, the amendment before the house will permit these people to requalify if they make 24 or more contributions during the preceding year. The amendment will permit a large number of those who were unable to qualify last fall to be brought within the act, and it is anticipated that almost 90 per cent of them will be brought within the act. Because of the limitations that our climate imposes on certain industries, many persons must of necessity confine their work to industries which are unable to provide as many as 30 weeks of insurable employment in any year. In 1955, when the act went into effect, 45 per cent of the people failed to qualify in October, November, December and January; whereas in the same period in the previous year only 29 per cent failed to qualify. It can therefore be seen that a considerable number of people were inadvertently disqualified. That was a result of the amendment.

Hon. Mr. McDonald: In what industries were the workers affected?

Hon. Mr. Croll: In all industries across the board. Everyone was affected as a result of the amendment.

Hon. Mr. McDonald: Civil servants too?

Hon. Mr. Croll: They do not come under the Unemployment Insurance Act. I should point out that by lowering the qualifying period to 24 weeks the benefit period will be shortened from 15 weeks to 12 weeks.