

Unemployment Insurance Act

In other words, Gill is saying that in its dealings with seasonal or winter unemployment there is a departure in the act from the ordinary insurance principle, which strikes at the actuarial soundness of the unemployment insurance fund.

Another major criticism that is made in the report is about the qualification for seasonal benefit. Near the bottom of the page is found this comment:

Many persons seemed to feel that the payment of seasonal benefit would perhaps not be objectionable in itself if it were financed by the general taxpayer rather than by those who were contributing to an insurance plan.

The next point to be dealt with in the Gill report has to do with abuses. I shall read the entire paragraph under the heading "Abuses" which appears on page 133 of the report:

The principal classes of alleged abuse that were drawn to our attention in representations made to us, apart from the question of payment of benefit to seasonal workers during their off season as just discussed, related to (a) the drawing of benefit by married women who are not in fact seeking employment; (b) the drawing of benefit by persons who have retired on pension and who are not in fact seeking employment; (c) the taking of too narrow a view by claimants and possibly by the administration as to the types of employment that constitute "suitable employment" in any individual case; (d) the failure by some claimants to disclose earnings during weeks of partial unemployment; (e) the failure by some claimants to disclose the true facts concerning their availability for employment; and (f) collusion between employers and employees in failing to give adequate information respecting the reasons for termination.

The report makes a strong case for an overhaul of the Unemployment Insurance Act. The public would be in sympathy with such action. But instead of doing any such thing the government has presented a measure which seeks, as I have said, to atone late in the day for the increase in inflation which this country has suffered since the current schedule of benefits was enacted by parliament. This has been done by increasing the salary level below which a person is eligible to pay for unemployment insurance and by increasing contributions and increasing benefits. Because of the social good that will flow from increased benefits I think the attempt is reasonable and worth while. Nevertheless, it is an attempt by the government to atone late in the day for the inflation it has unleashed on the country during the last number of years.

● (12:20 p.m.)

It fails to come to grips with several important things. It fails to come to grips with the

insurance principle which should lie at the heart of unemployment insurance, and it certainly discriminates against the married worker, the man with obligations. I hope the minister and his advisers will at least look at the schedule in clause 4 to see whether a better arrangement can be made for persons with dependants so they may enjoy at least the same ratio of benefit as those who do not bear the awesome responsibility of dependants. I hope the minister and his advisers will make a quick check on this point and correct what in my view is a most obvious injustice in this measure.

Mr. T. S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, I should like to join with the hon. member for Halifax (Mr. McCleave) in welcoming back to the house the former minister of labour. His absence has been so noticeable that we wonder—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. member will permit me to say at this time that it is against the usage of this house for hon. members to comment on the presence or absence of other members. It seems to me this is a practice which is creeping into our debates. Last week we heard members of the government side referring to the absence of members on the opposition side. Today we heard similar comments from the opposition. I suggest to hon. members that it is not a good practice.

Mr. Barnett: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In spite of the somewhat unusual circumstances which prevail at the present time I will defer to your wishes in this regard. One of the points I had in mind was that I wished to indicate that the minister now in charge of this bill is a former minister of labour and this being the case we can assume he has sufficient knowledge and experience to deal with points raised in relation to unemployment insurance as this measure proceeds through the house.

In his opening statement the minister referred both to matters dealt with in the bill and to matters related to the operation of the Unemployment Insurance Act which perhaps lie outside the scope of the bill. I find it much easier to deal with what is contained in the bill rather than with what is omitted. As I understand it, this measure is simply a repeat performance of a bill which was brought into the house by way of an amendment to the act in 1959. To this extent it underlines two points, one of which the minister has referred to. First, the current levels of contributions