

case of interruption of earnings due to sickness and pregnancy.

There are about three million working women in the labour force today and they are and have been for a long time a very vital part of our work force in Canada. Many have worked continually for a long time, have paid into the unemployment insurance fund for a long time, and then decided to have a child. As the minister stated yesterday, a large number of women work to provide the necessities for their families. Therefore, I believe they should be entitled to unemployment insurance benefits for a 15-week period to enable them to have a child. This, tied into amendments to the Labour Standards Code now before the House with respect to maternity leave, will give the female employee significant new rights to which, in my opinion, they are well entitled.

There was considerable discussion in our committee on the impact that the unemployment insurance benefits for interruption of earnings caused by sickness would have on present private employer-employee sickness plans. It was originally envisioned that the Unemployment Insurance Commission would be a second payer, to pay the difference between a private work-related plan and the total of a two-thirds benefit for the up to a 15-week benefit period. However, it soon became evident at our hearings that these private work-related plans would be quickly renegotiated between employers and employees to put the UIC into the position of first payer, with the private plans picking up supplementary coverage to top off the UIC and/or plan for coverage after the 15-week period.

While about two-thirds of the employees in Canada have either no sick leave insurance at all or else have sick coverage inferior to that proposed in this new legislation, there is about one-third of the work force that is covered by private work-related plans which give them as good or better coverage in this field than that proposed now by the government. It, therefore, became highly questionable whether the government should disturb these good plans which now provide this adequate coverage to these workers. Accordingly, there is a provision in this new act which allows the UIC to give a rebate in premium to an employer to cover the sickness insurance portion when that employer has as good or a better private sickness plan for which he is already paying. If part of that private plan is being paid for by employees also, then the employees will get a pro rata share of that rebate.

● (3:30 p.m.)

Before leaving the subject of sickness and maternity benefits, I think I should mention that the question of abuse control in this area has been thoroughly considered. I believe the member for Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander), expressed some fears on this subject last night and it was discussed from time to time in our hearings. However, the duration of benefits payable in sickness will be governed by consultation with medical authorities and will be payable only on presentation of a medical certificate authenticated by a member of the

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medical profession. The UIC has a great deal of experience in control and prevention of abuse which is just as applicable to sickness as to other benefits. Indeed, the UIC has been criticized by some in the past for being too strict in abuse control. The two-week waiting period for benefits of course will automatically rule out eligibility for short-term illness which causes great expense in some of the private plans where the waiting period is sometimes as short as two or three days. In addition, any work related sickness or injury will not give rise to a claim for benefits under unemployment insurance as such contingencies are covered under various provincial workmen's compensation acts.

I certainly do not have the time now, Mr. Speaker, to go into a detailed commentary on all the other diverse aspects of this new legislation. However, one of the points that both the hon. member for Hamilton West and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre raised last night concerned the advisability of making a non-returnable three-week lump sum benefit payment in advance after the two-week waiting period. We heard in committee the argument that it would be a deterrent to looking for a new job quickly and, on the other hand, that it would be an incentive to do so. It seems to me that those who see it as a deterrent to seeking early alternative employment have too gloomy a view of human nature and have also ignored the high cost of living, particularly in our urban areas.

Let us consider the case of the \$150 a week worker in Scarborough who is suddenly laid off. First of all, he will have to go two weeks without any income at all, and so loses \$300 less tax right there. Then, he is entitled to receive \$300 unemployment insurance benefits less income tax of say about \$60 for the next three weeks instead of \$450 less tax if he were still working. Accordingly, for the first five week period of unemployment he would receive a net of about \$240 from unemployment insurance benefits rather than \$750 less tax which he would have received from his ordinary employment. Now, the member for Hamilton West or others may think that this unemployed man, who is probably a skilled worker, will be tempted to stay home and not look for work in these circumstances. However, I strongly agree with the member for Winnipeg North Centre on this particular point. I believe that particular, proud, skilled craftsman will want to get back to work as quickly as possible; that he really will not be able to afford to stay at home, and that the three-week guaranteed benefit payment will be an incentive to search for new work immediately. Our committee did recommend that this lump sum three-week payment be made in two instalments, to help tide the worker over that period. I understand that the government is thinking seriously of doing this, but the basic right of the unemployed person to three weeks of benefits after a two-week waiting period, whether or not he finds a job in the meantime, should remain.

I am sure other members will have very worthwhile contributions to make in this debate and I shall look forward to hearing them. I could have said a lot more about the value of the greatly increased benefits, the