

Unemployment Insurance Act

House is not a vote in favour of or against adoption. Neither is it a vote for or against a kind of assistance to adoptive parents who need some temporary assistance to take care of their child. The Unemployment Insurance Act is by no means the appropriate instrument to provide them with income security.

It is true that some adoptive parents need financial assistance whereas others do not. But neither these nor the others have been involuntarily taken away from the work force. The decision of adopting a child is taken consciously. So is also the decision to leave the labour force, which is a consequence of it. Let us think about the basic goal of unemployment insurance, which is to provide temporary income when somebody is no longer on a payroll, so that the worker may resume his place within the labour force as soon as possible. That is the basic goal of unemployment insurance. In Canada, unemployment is a serious problem, and the unemployment insurance plan is not a welfare program.

Nor is it a remedy to give general comfort in every new social need, regardless of how legitimate it may be. I am convinced that unemployment insurance is not the appropriate vehicle to supplement the income of parents who decide to adopt a child and who must, for extremely valid reasons, quit the labour force for a while.

As maternity benefits already exist, I understand readily why some would like adoptive parents to receive them as well. At first glance, it seems reasonable enough. But, in fact, this would conflict with the insurance principles on which the unemployment insurance system is based. Maternity benefits are paid out because the prospective mother is unable to work. Adoptive parents on the other hand are physically able to work, though the adoption centres require that a parent stay at home for a while.

Above all, the unemployment insurance system must not become a substitute for other social benefit programs. That is one of the great fallacies of our times: that unemployment insurance should be the mechanism through which the federal government meets all legitimate needs of Canadians. Unemployment insurance is a social insurance but not the answer to Canadians' need for income, regardless of their nature. The House of Commons is now studying Bill C-27 which will amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. During the debate, I am sure all hon. members will have the opportunity of presenting their views on the subject. The aim is to make unemployment insurance more efficient and to bringing it closer to its intended purpose. The amendments are drawn up in such a way as to reinforce the insurance aspect of the plan, to underscore its basic insurance principles.

I do not deny the fact that adoptive parents may really need some form of assistance for their worthy efforts. In some ways, the role of the adoptive parent may be even more difficult and demanding than that of a natural parent. Still, I cannot support the motion because I am convinced that, although adoptive parents may need help, unemployment insurance is not the vehicle through which it should be given.

[Mr. Portelance.]

• (1710)

[English]

Mr. J. Larry Condon (Middlesex-London-Lambton): Mr. Speaker, I have two immediate reactions to the suggestion that the unemployment insurance benefit be extended to adoptive parents. The first is to point out that this is not a new subject. Indeed, it has been considered by the Unemployment Insurance Commission on many occasions over the last five years. My second reaction is that adoptive parents certainly deserve consideration of the special problems that they face. There is little doubt that in some cases adoptive parents may—and I say “may”—have more difficulties in caring for their new child than the parents of newborn infants. So a proposal to extend UIC benefits to adoptive parents cannot be dismissed lightly. We have to see how adoptive parents and natural parents differ under the Unemployment Insurance Act and then weigh whether unemployment insurance is the proper program to assist both groups.

I am convinced that adoptive parents may well need support programs. In many cases I feel bound to question whether the Unemployment Insurance Act is the proper piece of legislation to provide this support. The adoptive parent plays an essential role in our society and the adoption process brings the joys of parenthood into many lives.

There have, of course, been dramatic changes in adoption in our society over the last several years. At one time the majority of adopted children were infants and there were in fact a large number of infants available for adoption. Now, changing social values have radically altered this pattern—for better or for worse it is an individual's decision to make. Conception control measures are more sophisticated. Single mothers are more and more tending to keep their babies instead of putting them up for adoption. For both reasons there is no longer a large surplus of unwanted babies available for an insufficient number of prospective parents; quite the reverse is true in many areas.

Social values regarding adoption are changing in many ways. For example, it would have been virtually unheard of 10 or 15 years ago for a single parent to adopt a child. While it is still far from the norm, it is happening more and more now. Children's aid societies are encouraging the adoption of older children. In many cases these are children with behavioural, psychological or physical problems. Their needs and the needs of their adoptive parents are, therefore, different from the need of many adoptive parents in the past.

In this new world of adoption it is probably fair to say that many adopting families have adequate means of income, although I must say that that is not the criterion of the Children's aid societies. Children's aid societies pay a great deal of attention to the suitability of adopting families, and income is one of the criteria which they use in making their decisions, though I can assure the House it is not the major one. Because of requirements like this, many adoptive families are in the middle or upper income brackets. Their need for financial support, including unemployment insurance, may therefore be questioned.