

4.4 Deputy G.P. Southern of the Minister for Education, Sport and Culture regarding the terms and conditions which are currently applied to maternity leave and pay for teachers:

Will the Minister outline for Members the terms and conditions which are currently applied to maternity leave and pay for teachers?

Senator M.E. Vibert (The Minister for Education, Sport and Culture):

May I regret the previous incident and say I dislike intensely what appears to be McCarthyism creeping into this chamber. But in answer to the question of Deputy Southern in order to qualify for maternity leave a teacher must normally be employed on a permanent basis and have completed one year's service including a satisfactory probation period. A period of 18 weeks including school holiday periods is allowed for maternity leave although in exceptional circumstances this may be extended to 26 weeks at the discretion of the department. A teacher is paid 90 per cent of his or her normal pensionable pay for 12 weeks of her maternity, the balance - the 6 unpaid weeks or 14 weeks in exceptional circumstances - counts as continuous service.

4.4.1 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Supplementary if I may? Is the Minister aware that the interpretation of the regulations is such that even one day's sick leave during the period after return to work is counted as breaking continuous service and that teachers are effectively forcing themselves into work against health and safety practice in order to maintain their maternity pay.

Senator M.E. Vibert:

There have been discussions with the teachers' unions about changes to the conditions of service. The arrangement in respect of maternity pay for teachers is directly comparable to civil servants and manual workers. If a teacher is certified medically unfit to return to work the period of maternity leave can be extended on the production of a medical certificate. Any such extension of leave will be unpaid.

4.4.2 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Is the Minister satisfied that such an extension meets the needs of returning mothers and does he accept that a condition of one day's sick pay will break the continuous period is an unreasonable one for his department to be demanding?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

It is not a question of demanding, it is a question of the currently agreed conditions of service which are open to negotiation and I regret that an offer made to change some of those conditions of service were not accepted by the unions.

4.4.3 Deputy G.P. Southern:

Final question. Then I shall change the wording and say does the Minister not accept that such conditions are unreasonable on the part of the employer?

Senator M.E. Vibert:

I repeat, we have tried to renegotiate some of the conditions and so far that has not been successfully agreed with unions.