

Government Orders

Let us look at some of the common misconceptions about the impact of the proposed changes. We have heard it said that employers will have greater power over the workers. First of all, the Canada Employment Centre staff members do not make decisions based solely on information provided by the employer. They try to obtain all the necessary facts from all the appropriate sources, including the claimant. They collect all the pertinent information available and make the decision based on the credibility of the statements and the testimony. If employee versions are dramatically different and no evidence is found to tip the balance one way or the other, they give the benefit of the doubt to the claimant.

The Canada Employment Centre staff's responsibility is to find out why someone quit and to determine whether it was a reasonable thing to do under the circumstances, in other words, whether the claimant had just cause.

Where sexual harassment is alleged, neither the claimant nor the employer will be subjected to intensive, possibly even distasteful questioning. Here again the benefit of the doubt will go to the claimant.

Some people have argued that there are legitimate reasons for leaving a job, other than those set down in the UI act. That is so. Other reasons are and will continue to be considered on the basis of their merit. They have also argued that Canadians should not be penalized from receiving benefits if they leave a job in order to preserve the job of other co-workers. We agree on that one. That is why workers who leave jobs to preserve the jobs of their co-workers as part of the work force reduction plan program will be eligible for UI benefits.

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Since the Minister of Finance made his economic statement, some critics have alleged that the changes deny some workers their right to UI benefits. Let us remember that unemployment insurance benefits are not a right. They are insurance. They are insurance against, in most cases, the involuntary loss of a job. Unemployment insurance is designed to provide temporary help for workers who have lost their jobs. UI provides the income support they need while they look for new jobs. It should not be an income support system

for people who choose unemployment. After all, no one expects to be able to deliberately burn down his or her house and then collect the insurance. Why should anyone expect to deliberately quit his or her job and collect unemployment insurance?

Would the members opposite suggest that a farmer who burns his fields and then asks for crop insurance should get it? I do not think so. As for the charge that the Canadian Employment Centre staff would actually try to deny benefits to claimants with just cause is an insult to those dedicated professionals who staff these positions right across our country.

Their job is to collect the pertinent information from all sources and make the decision. They are trained to understand the difficulties faced by the unemployed workers and to respond to the claimant as a human being rather than as a claim being processed.

Before the proposed changes go into effect the Canada Employment Centre will conduct staff orientation sessions to increase the awareness among the staff, particularly in the area of sexual harassment. These orientation sessions will be prepared with the participation of the status of women. We look forward to its input.

Specific training will now include how to process claims under the new legislation, how to focus on the relevant facts of each particular situation, how to apply the principles and practices of adjudication and how to evaluate information when making the decision.

Why is the government proposing these changes? I think it is obvious. UI was set up to provide people who lose their jobs through no fault of their own with a temporary income while they look for work.

Employees and employers fund the UI program by paying premiums. However, the premiums being collected no longer cover all the claims for UI benefits. From a \$2.2 billion surplus in 1990, the UI account has gone to a \$4.5 billion deficit. Even with these proposed changes, it is estimated that the UI account will be \$7.5 billion in the red by the end of this year. Without the changes, it is projected that the account would be \$8.5 billion in the red.

It is obvious to most Canadians, if not to the opposition, that something has to be done to staunch this flood of red ink. There are only two ways to tackle this issue,