

The CLC brief goes on to say that Bill C-113 is part of the free trade agenda to force workers to stay in low-paid dead-end jobs and to harmonize Canada's labour and social standards with the lower ones in the United States. As well, the brief underlines that the Prime Minister has cited the U.S. unemployment system in defending the cuts. The CLC also emphasizes that, in the U.S., less than 40 per cent of unemployed workers are entitled to benefits, that the maximum benefit period is 26 weeks, and that most state-run UI programs have a 50 per cent benefit rate or lower.

Whatever the rationale behind Bill C-113, one thing is clear: Canada's unemployed will bear the brunt of this devastating and ill-considered policy devised by the Conservative government.

[Translation]

As I said earlier, with the new restrictions on unemployment insurance benefits, from now on the burden of proof will be on the employee who quits his job. In 1986, the Tories set up the Forget Commission, which recommended sweeping changes in the existing unemployment insurance system. However, Claude Forget himself challenged the measures in Bill C-113 and referred to them as examples of poor political timing and useless economic measures, as well as a waste of time and leading to a loss of political credibility. They didn't have much political credibility left, in any case.

Since the burden of proof will be on them, victims of sexual harassment and people working under terrible conditions will be unlikely to file a complaint. Immigrant women and non-union workers will be even more vulnerable than before. The government should not introduce measures that practically chain employees to their jobs, even if working conditions become intolerable.

In taking this approach, the Conservative government has completely overlooked one of the essential aspects of the unemployment insurance system. The system must not only provide an income substitute but also encourage employee mobility. Draconian and punitive measures will, however, discourage many people from looking for better jobs, so that many workers will have to be satisfied with low-paying, dead-end jobs.

If this bill is passed, the system may be swept by an avalanche of court appeals. That is another aspect this government has overlooked. For instance, in 1991, unemployment insurance benefits were denied 191,000 claimants, allegedly because they had quit without just cause. However, 19,000 claimants managed to win their case, either through an in-house review or before a board of referees. The minister hardly has the resources to deal with current appeal

cases. Since the new regulations come down harder on employees who quit, the number of appeals can be expected to soar and thus overload the system.

Honourable senators, the government claims this bill is necessary to reduce the number of people who abuse the system by quitting without just cause. However, the government's timing is slightly off, because according to the statistics, fewer employees are quitting as a result of the recession. In September 1988, when the Canadian economy was in full flight, more than 31,000 people quit their jobs, compared with only 26,000 in September 1990 and 16,700 in September 1992. The recession and the additional sanctions provided under Bill C-21 do not really encourage Canadians to change jobs. The only thing the Tories have accomplished with this bill is to seriously restrict manpower mobility and pauperize people who look for a new job.

[English]

In some jurisdictions, for instance, those denied benefits under the "just cause" proposal would not automatically be eligible to collect social assistance. Municipalities have the discretionary power to adjust or delay receipt of social assistance benefits for those who have voluntarily quit their jobs. In addition, it is unlikely individuals would be immediately eligible for social assistance while they plead their cases through the appeal process.

It makes no sense whatsoever to remove the safety net protecting unemployed Canadians. It makes no sense to impoverish some of them as they seek to make the transition from one job to another. This is yet another example of the federal government shifting its responsibilities to a lower level of government. It is strikingly similar to what the Conservatives did with the restrictive measures contained in Bill C-21.

[Translation]

Opposition to that measure is so widespread that it has gained support from various groups who rarely stand together. According to union and management leaders from Quebec, many of the province's seasonal workers will be hard hit by those reforms. The unions also think that since the only money going into the unemployment insurance fund is employer and employee contributions, the federal government cannot change the management of that fund without first consulting these two groups. Employers agree in principle. Furthermore, as we have seen earlier in the article from *Le Devoir*, union leaders fear that certain companies will announce wage cuts as soon as the bill is passed since employees displeased with that decision would not be eligible to UI benefits if they quit.