

Government Orders

If a person goes to the unemployment insurance office to apply for unemployment insurance and she gives sexual harassment as the reason for quitting her previous job, she simply fills out the form and she is referred. She is even able to have her case heard by a person of her choice in the unemployment insurance office. She fills out the form and then automatically has the benefit of the doubt.

• (1735)

It is up to the employer and the employer may be called, but in the case of sexual harassment it is quite clear that the person has the benefit of the doubt.

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Langlois: Yes, she has.

As for the other question she put about social cuts, I have to tell her that the unemployment insurance system is an insurance system. It is not a social benefit system. It is an insurance system to which the employers and employees contribute to make sure there is money available when people lose their jobs and need to apply to the unemployment insurance system. It is not a social benefit program. It is an insurance system and should be treated as such.

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas.

I would also like to say a few words about this legislation, an act to provide for government expenditure restraint. I want to focus my remarks on the features of this legislation that bear upon the unemployment insurance program, specifically those that would cut the rate of UI benefits from 60 per cent to 57 per cent and those that would deny benefits to those claimants who, in the words of the UI act, quit their work without just cause.

To begin, I want to say that I am not any more impressed with this legislation than I was with its ill-fated predecessor. I am not going to focus, as others have done, on the definitions of just cause and the problems of litigation that will befall the unemployed person who seeks to be considered under one of the 14 categories of exception provided for in clause 18 of the bill. That does not mean that I do not consider these issues to be important. I do. However, in the short time available to me I would like to address other ways in which I believe this legislation is misguided.

I noted that these changes in the UI act are being introduced by the Minister of Finance as measures to contain the deficit and maintain an environment that supports economic growth and increased employment.

Once again the Tories have chosen to ask those that are the main victims of the recession, the unemployed, to bear the burden of expenditure restraint, while at the same time they enact other measures that allow the wealthy to continue to escape paying their fair share of taxation and contributing to deficit reduction.

My problem with Bill C-113, as well as with Bill C-21 of two years ago and the other changes that this government has made to the UI program and related legislation, concerns the government's failure to address the fundamental changes that need to be made to this program and to other programs in order to enable Canadians to adjust to the free trade environment in which we now find ourselves and to make our economy and its most precious asset, namely our people, more competitive in the next decade.

I want to talk about not what this government does with Bill C-113 but what it fails to do. These points are important to make in this debate as this legislation comes from the Minister of Finance and flows from his mini budget of last December.

The pain of this recession and the many human tragedies it has exacted has been exacerbated by the failure of this government to put in place, as the Prime Minister promised during the last election campaign, a comprehensive and coherent program of adjustment policies to deal with the fall-out of the FTA and to prepare Canadians for the future.

This is one of the great failures in the economic policy of this government. Its human costs are incalculable and will be felt and borne by millions of Canadian families for years and generations to come.

These costs are every bit as important and are quite linked to the cost of the growing and worrisome Canadian debt. If the Canadian economy does not respond to the profound changes that have taken place around the world, in order to be more flexible and be able to respond, we will fall further behind. We will deal with the problem of higher than acceptable unemployment for years and years to come.