

Supply

There is also a comprehensive system of appeal and other services available to a claimant who may be denied benefits. If benefits are denied the claimant is given the reason in writing. The claimant is also told how to appeal to the board of referees. A pamphlet explaining the appeals process is automatically sent to the claimant. If the claimant asks for help the Canada Employment Centre gives it willingly.

The staff will explain the reason for the decision, the appeals process and its time-frames and give advice on preparing arguments before the board of referees. Copies of the Unemployment Insurance Act regulations, court decisions and commission policy on adjudication are available to claimants at CEC offices. Claimants are not faced with an adversarial or accusatory atmosphere when they indicate why they quit their jobs.

Giving the benefit of the doubt to claimants who believe they have just cause is a firmly established tradition within the administration of the UI program.

Any member of this House or anyone else who has taken the time to actually look at the administration of the UI act would be aware that it is interpreted fairly and in favour of claimants. Now the government has, particularly in the case of sexual harassment, come out even more vigorously on the side of those who leave work with what they feel is a just cause.

To characterize these amendments as regressive or unfair to those who quit with just cause or who lose their job through no fault of their own is to do a great disservice to what are carefully considered and necessary changes to our UI program. These changes are not an attack on the unemployed. They are an attack on unemployment. The only losers will be those who choose to be unemployed, not those who are unemployed through no fault of their own.

The changes reinforce the UI program's fundamental mandate to provide Canadians with temporary income and the option of special training while looking for work. Let there be no misunderstanding. It is these Canadians, including those who leave their jobs with just cause, who deserve to remain the priority of a more focused, more cost-effective unemployment insurance program.

I believe that the opposition is doing a great disservice to the country by using this mechanism of the House to propagate erroneous and misleading information.

Mr. Ken Hughes (Macleod): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity to ask questions and make very brief comments on this important issue today.

Watching what is going on here today intrigues me. It is quite clear that the Liberal Party of Canada is playing a very transparent, shallow game of shameful, partisan politics. It is shocking and not worthy of what was once a great party in this nation. It is clearly stooping to very low measures.

When I went home to my riding in Alberta after the December 2 statement by the Minister of Finance, who also happens to be an Albertan, I heard from many people about the initiatives regarding the unemployment insurance system. The remarkable thing is that the most common comment I heard was: "You mean we pay people when they quit voluntarily?" Many people did not know that. They thought that was something which should not be done.

We are talking about the unemployment insurance fund. It is not for people who choose to cease working for a company or who choose to become unemployed simply because they want to. It is an unemployment insurance fund that should be there for people during times of need. There is plenty of need out there. This government is trying to ensure that the support is there for people who need it if the time comes and they lose the opportunity to be employed. It is a question of fairness, a question that is very important.

I am glad that we are debating this matter today. I wonder if the minister could add to the comments she has already made about what circumstances there are to protect people and make sure that they are dealt with fairly under the existing provisions. Could the hon. minister respond to those concerns?

Mrs. Browes: Mr. Speaker, I welcome those comments. We had a few weeks to be back in our constituencies to hear firsthand from Canadians how they feel about various issues. I have to agree with my colleague that I received the same kinds of comments that he did in Alberta.

People were surprised that people actually got paid when they just quit their jobs. The hon. member is quite right. People are saying: "Well, listen. It is a pretty tough market out there. I value my job and I am not prepared to pay for somebody who just decides that they are going to quit".