

Government Orders

The unemployment insurance program was a great step forward for Canada, if we look back at the period before we had it. It is not only good for the workers who lose their jobs, because it helps them to put bread on the table, pay their rent, and take care of their children during that period of unemployment, but it is also good for the whole community because it keeps money in circulation. It is good for the corner store. It is good for the person who is renting homes because they do not go bankrupt. We avoid the snowball effect that happened in the 1930s when a whole community went under because there was no unemployment insurance. Unemployment insurance economically sustains the whole community during periods of unemployment.

While this bill is an improvement on Bill C-105 it is still not good enough. Unless the government improves it even more we are still going to oppose it.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to the hon. member who said, in concluding, that when unemployment insurance was introduced, it was a good thing for the unemployed. It still is. As far as we know, people who lose their jobs will always be able to receive unemployment insurance benefits. In fact, I think the hon. member is making a mountain out of a mole hill, and even engaging in demagoguery.

• (1250)

In the bill before the House today, eight valid reasons have been added for quitting one's employment. These apply to more than 40 situations that are considered to be just cause for quitting one's job on a voluntary basis, including adoption, pregnancy, union activities, going into business or becoming self-employed, moving to get married, a job that would require a person to work away from his family, and so forth. After exhausting all these possibilities, a person who decides to quit voluntarily without just cause, without provocation, will be assumed, according to this bill, to be the author of his own misfortune, and Canadian workers should not have to pay for that person.

Finally, the hon. member is actually saying he is fully prepared to pay for people who voluntarily quit their jobs and abuse the system. Considering the deficit in the unemployment insurance fund, it is clear the federal government has to borrow on international markets to be able to finance that particular deficit and the Canadian deficit. What is the result? The result is that your

children and my children and future generations will be saddled with a debt that was created because we did not have the guts to put some teeth into the system.

My question to the hon. member is very straightforward. Does he really mean what he and his party are saying, when he rises in the House and says that he disagrees with our proposal to put some teeth into the system and make people who create their own misfortune, their own situation, bear the cost? That is how insurance works. Madam Speaker, have you ever seen a person who set his house on fire get compensation from the insurance company? What we are saying is that someone who sets his house on fire, who voluntarily quits his job without just cause, should not expect the workers of this country to pay his keep. Does the hon. member really mean it when he says we should maintain the status quo, ignore the deficit and keep raising the national debt and mortgaging the lives of future generations?

[English]

Mr. Allmand: Madam Speaker, as I and members of this party have said several times in our speeches, we believe in a penalty for those who quit without just cause, but the penalty has to be reasonable in consideration of the fact that just cause is often a grey area. It often is not clear cut, is very difficult to prove, takes a long time, and so on.

We do believe in a penalty that is reasonable. We believe in such reasonable penalties because we know, and the hon. member should know as well but he does not seem to, that even if you get unemployment insurance after, let us say, a penalty of five or six weeks you have to be ready and available for work. If you are not ready and available for work, then you can be totally denied unemployment insurance.

I would like to ask the hon. member a question, but he will not be able to answer. Maybe members of his party will be able to answer when they speak further in this debate. In 1990, just two years ago, the government did not seem to have this view of the unemployment insurance system. What it did was it extended the range of weeks of penalty to those who quit without just cause. At that time, two years ago, the government did not seem to think it was necessary to totally deny unemployment insurance benefits to those who might quit in a very difficult situation, because it was realized that they had to be ready and available for work and if they were not they would be denied benefits altogether.