

*Oral Questions*

In metropolitan Toronto, which traditionally has been a key economic piston of the Canadian engine, the unemployment rate has been higher than the national average. There are over \$9 billion worth of local contracts being held up by the national government and the provincial Government of Ontario. Repeatedly, our leader, our caucus and our party have asked for an infrastructure program to stimulate and create jobs and confidence.

The Americans are doing it. The Japanese are doing it. The Europeans are doing it. Canadians expect that Canada should be doing it.

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**ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[Translation]

**UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM**

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Prime Minister. Yesterday, about 50,000 people marched in -25C degree weather to protest the Draconian and rather bizarre changes in the Unemployment Insurance Act proposed by the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

Does the Prime Minister intend to take the matter in hand and look for a more acceptable solution before we have a serious problem in this country, especially in Quebec?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, like many others who exaggerate the impact of Bill C-105, the Leader of the Opposition also tends to exaggerate the number of people who took part in the demonstration, but that does not matter. What does matter is that the changes proposed by the government are supported by Canadians, because Canadians agree we need an economy that creates jobs.

To create jobs, we need an economic climate with low interest rates and a low rate of inflation. To achieve this, we must control the deficit. To control the deficit, especially one that must be paid for by workers and employers, we had to take steps to control the increasing deficit in the unemployment insurance account. To do

that, we decided to deny benefits paid for by workers and employers to people who, without just cause, decide to join the ranks of the unemployed.

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, I will put a question to the minister, since the Prime Minister does not want to take the matter in hand.

Why is the minister going across Canada telling Canadians that people who leave their jobs voluntarily to draw unemployment insurance benefits do not pay a penalty, although there is a penalty of 7 to 12 weeks for people who quit voluntarily? Why is the Minister of Employment and Immigration trying to mislead people? The truth is that the penalties for those who quit voluntarily are already very severe.

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member claims I said the opposite. It is true that currently there is a penalty of 7 to 12 weeks, which costs workers—those who are really working—taxpayers and employers \$1 billion annually, because of 225,000 people who quit their jobs each year without just cause. We are saying that we want to save taxpayers money instead of spending it on benefits for a person who, without just cause, decides to become unemployed.

[English]

**Hon. Jean Chrétien (Leader of the Opposition):** Mr. Speaker, we are all in agreement that those who are cheaters should be cut. The problem is that the minister wants to put everyone, including women who quit their jobs because of sexual harassment and people who quit their jobs for other valid reasons, into the same category as cheaters.

• (1420)

Why does the minister not try to find a better reason than the one he is trying to sell to the Canadian people today?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Mr. Speaker, I invite the hon. member to read Bill C-105. If he reads it he will find that a person in Canada subjected to sexual or any other kind of harassment on the job has a valid reason to quit and will receive protection.