

Supply

My hon. colleague should read the letter the Minister of Finance received from the Quebec Bar Association, signed by its president, and look at the specific arguments set forth there.

I would like to add that not all those who quit their jobs are trying to defraud the UI system, as my hon. colleague was referring to.

Mr. Speaker, 43 per cent found work within 10 weeks in 1991. Certainly those are not the ones who have abused the system. There are of course some in every system, but to claim that there are over 200,000, that is a bit much. When the minister says that, of the \$600 million he wants to save, over \$200 goes to people who abuse the UI system, I think that is an exaggeration. As the hon. member for Jonquière said: "You are out to kill a fly with a gun." I think it is a fine choice of words. Perhaps the hon. member could consult his colleague from Jonquière.

Mr. Guy Saint-Julien (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Saint-Léonard about his motion. I know the Quebec Bar Association said: "In the light of the jurisprudence". Currently, the act covers five valid grounds for voluntary departure. Jurisprudence provides another forty. It says here: "It would appear that in a number of situations where the employer demonstrated there were valid grounds for voluntary departure, as opposed to any justification, the umpire was able to impose the minimum penalty".

In his speech, the hon. member said it would create a considerable backlog in the judicial system. The hon. member is right, because we have no idea of the number of appeals now before the umpire. I know that in Abitibi, in Val d'Or, there are 16 appeals pending. The umpire may hear the appeals in six months or a year from now, or it may even take two years. It is a lengthy process. We know that Bill C-105 will increase the number of appeals before the umpire.

By the way, this evening I know I will abstain from voting on this motion, for the simple reason that in 1978, the Minister of Finance at the time reduced unemployment insurance benefits from 66-2/3 to 60 per cent. However, I do have the following question: Could the hon. member tell me how many appeals are now before the umpire in Montreal and Quebec generally? Does he know how many?

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am sorry to hear the hon. member will abstain this evening. As I said

at the beginning of my speech, it is all very well to make statements to the media in our ridings, but where it counts is here. I have great respect for the hon. member, and I really regret his decision. I hope that by eight o'clock he will have had time to reconsider.

The Montreal region is a large one. He repeated the point I made that these measures will flood the system with cases, at a time when the system is already overloaded. In the Montreal region, there are about 200,000 appeal cases pending. Considering the number of unemployed workers today the figures for which are constantly changing because there are always new cases, some cases are dealt with and other cases come back, and so forth. I cannot give him a specific answer right now. After April 1, when these measures are implemented, it will be a disaster, and for that reason alone, I ask the hon. member to reconsider and to vote in favour of the motion.

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, as far political rhetoric goes, this takes the cake. The opposition motion says: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance benefits to workers who quit their jobs—". That is just not true. Bill C-105 contains no reference to cutting off unemployment insurance benefits to those who quit their jobs. It says "to those who leave their employment without just cause". Right from the start, this motion fails to reflect the real situation and misrepresents the facts. For these reasons I urge all members of this House to vote against the motion.

• (1620)

I have a short question for the hon. member. He alluded to some of my colleagues in the Conservative Party who expressed reservations about the bill. I can inform him they did so to improve the way the Unemployment Insurance Act is administered. Today, government members are making a number of very practical and valid suggestions for improving the way the Unemployment Insurance Act is implemented. What is the opposition prepared to suggest? Instead of this constant criticism, what are those members prepared to suggest to improve the Unemployment Insurance Act? Instead of criticizing and condemning this legislation, it is high time the opposition and the Liberal Party decided, once and for all, to suggest some concrete alternatives for dealing with the problems of this country.