

*Government Orders*

These are only corrections of errors made in the badly designed Bill C-105. There is nothing in the bill that corrects the arbitrary nature of the proposed changes. Indeed, the minister almost seems to be proud of the bill's arbitrary, merciless quality.

It is no secret that the minister of employment has little sympathy for the unemployed. His crude description of voluntary quitters as freeloaders who take off to Florida or the ski slopes reveals his generalized contempt. Bill C-113 reveals the government's approach to Canada's unemployment crisis. It focuses on voluntary quitters but ignores the 1.6 million people in this country who cannot find work.

We were given an indication of the government's attitude toward this issue two weeks ago when a number of government members addressed an opposition day on Bill C-105. Most of the attacks on the motion were fairly standard Tory rhetoric, rambling, unfocused, sometimes making irrelevant observations.

However, one speech stood out. It was the one made by the Minister of State for Employment and Immigration. I am glad she felt this issue is serious enough to warrant a coherent, though misleading, response.

The minister's speech seems to be a fairly accurate summary of the government's position in the debate of these changes. That position amounts to a very simplistic rhetorical question: Is it fair for those who pay UI premiums to support people who decide to leave their job on a whim in order to take a little vacation? The answer to this frivolous query is a resounding, of course it is not fair. No one is arguing this.

For the record, I would like to say that I think it is wrong for someone to quit a job on a whim in order to take a few months of holiday at the expense of the unemployment insurance program. For the record, however, I am pleased to say that I have never met a person who has done this. Of the unemployed people I have met, not one is happy about his or her position. Each and every one of them wants a job immediately.

In reality, the unemployed are desperate for work. Despite the discouragement and despair of 1.6 million unemployed Canadians and 2.2 million Canadians who are on welfare, this government has chosen not to address seriously the problems of the unemployed.

Instead the Conservative government perseveres with the despicable fiction that our worst problem as a society is the army of freeloaders cashing their UI cheques in Florida and Jasper.

When the minister of employment and his colleagues in government are not leading a smear campaign against certain Canadians who leave their jobs, they are trying to assure us that the law will protect all those who leave their jobs with good reason.

During the debate I mentioned earlier, the Minister of State for Employment and Immigration said:

These changes will affect only those who voluntarily leave their jobs without just cause or who are fired for misconduct.

Wrong. The changes may be aimed at people who quit their jobs without reason or who are fired with reason. In reality, they will affect many others. The minister would have to be incredibly naive to think otherwise. Later in her speech, the minister referred to the special protections built into the guidelines for field officers as they relate to the question of sexual harassment.

In cases where all things are considered equal, the benefit of the doubt will be given to the claimant and thus tip the scale in his or her favour.

• (1100)

The minister puts a great deal of faith in the idea that the benefit of the doubt will be given to such women when they apply for unemployment insurance. I have to ask her however, what does benefit of the doubt mean? Does it mean that every woman who makes a claim and gives sexual harassment as her reason for quitting will get benefits?

As soon as you answer no, and reason dictates that you do so, you allow for errors. You admit that some women who are harassed but cannot prove it will not get benefits. You accept as a given that some deserving women are going to fall through the cracks. That is unacceptable to the Liberal Party. We in the Liberal Party say that these changes are too inflexible, too unyielding. They stack the deck against the most vulnerable among us and victimize the innocent.

The government believes that the letter and the spirit of the legislation will protect the innocent. We on this side of the House know that in the real world there are delays. We know that decisions are sometimes made in error. We know that people fall through the cracks.