

Government Orders

• (1705)

We all know that any system is going to have a few people who are going to take advantage of it. The members opposite who are bringing in this bill know how very small that number is. However, to change a whole system to punish those who are simply trying to survive this recession in Canada is unjust.

Obviously the government has forgotten the purpose of the unemployment insurance plan. Yes, it is to help workers through difficult times, but that is only part of it. Part of the reason for helping workers through difficult times is so when times get better—hopefully they are getting better now or are starting to get better—those people are still in their communities to work on the jobs that come back when the recession is over.

That is why this plan relies on the contributions of both employers and employees because it benefits both. It also helps communities. One of the big reasons for bringing in unemployment insurance after the Second World War was to avoid the tremendous disruption that happened not only to families and individuals but to communities across this country. Small towns and villages and rural communities across Canada were emptied out as people hit the rails looking for any kind of work anywhere they could find it. Businesses were robbed of their customer bases and closed down. Families broke up. Communities fell apart never to come back again.

We have an unemployment insurance scheme to help workers through tough times, help employers retain their employment bases for when the jobs come back and prevent the destruction of communities and families.

I had the privilege during the debate on Bill C-21, which was the previous round of amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act, to travel across Canada to listen to seasonal workers, women workers, transitory workers, people in the construction industry and people from all parts of this country. They talked about what the unemployment insurance scheme has meant to them and their families over the years. The unemployment situation was not nearly as bad then as it is now, but it was a matter of survival.

We have a country where it is cold and dark for a good part of the year. That means there are a lot of jobs that simply disappear for the winter. There are other jobs

that simply disappear for the summer. For many people in many fields of endeavour, 12 months of work is simply not possible in this country.

There was an interview this morning about the construction industry and whether people who are out of work for the winter in this industry really should not be transferring to some other kind of work. I do not think the construction companies that want those employees there when the jobs come back really think that is a terrific idea, but they also know one cannot pour concrete in the middle of winter and one cannot lay asphalt.

The reality of Canada is that we are always going to have those periods when there are no jobs.

I want to talk briefly about harassment because I doubt very much that the people on the other side who are supporting this bill really understand what a woman experiences. They do not know how difficult it is for her to deal with in the work place, decide that she will sacrifice the economic well-being of her family to protect her dignity by quitting her job and then have to prove she was harassed before she can collect unemployment insurance.

• (1710)

The minister talked about training for employees who have to deal with claims of harassment in the work place, but did not talk about training for the referees who will make the final decisions.

As I look through the close to 200 appointments that have been made by the Prime Minister and cabinet in the last couple of months and I look at the appointments to the boards of referees under the unemployment insurance scheme, I see very few women's names among them.

We heard talk about how the unemployment insurance fund is in such a mess because of training. The unemployment insurance fund is not in a mess because of training. It is because this government chose to give up its responsibilities to train people and retrain them. Instead, it has forced employees, the unemployed and employers to pay for training.

It wants Canadians to forget that it cut \$750 million for training at a time when we needed to be more competitive and productive. It increased unemployment insurance fees by over 30 per cent. It increased the burden on