

The unemployment insurance program must have as its priority the provision of a basic income and should not become a fund for training initiatives. We cannot forget that unemployment insurance economically sustains the whole community during periods of unemployment.

In 1989-90, the last full year of federal contributions to the UI account, the government's contributions totalled \$2.67 billion. In 1990, unemployment insurance benefits amounted to \$13.2 billion, up 14 per cent over 1989. As a result of the recession and subsequent high unemployment, \$17.7 billion was put out in benefits in 1991, 34.2 per cent higher than in 1990. It is estimated that close to \$22 billion will be paid out in 1993. Premiums paid by the employers and employees have increased twice in the last two years. The premiums were increased by 24 per cent in 1991 and by a further 7.1 per cent in 1992.

Unfortunately, all predictions concerning future employment prospects point towards continued high levels of unemployment, despite the high hope of economic growth. It is what many have termed a "jobless recovery". I believe that unemployed Canadians have a right to expect their governments to work cooperatively together to ensure that we experience continuous job creation, adjustment programs for displaced workers, and the ever-growing desire to produce a positive environment for continuous learning — one in which Canadians are able to fully develop and learn the required skills needed as our technology rapidly advances.

Finally, honourable senators, I want to spend a few moments talking about the issue of "just cause" and specifically the issue of harassment. Part IV of the bill amends the Unemployment Insurance Act. Clause 18 defines reasons of "just cause" for voluntarily leaving employment. It reads as follows:

(4) For the purposes of this section, "just cause" for voluntarily leaving an employment exists where, having regard to all the circumstances, including any of the following circumstances, the claimant had no reasonable alternative to leaving the employment:

(a) sexual or other harassment;

• (1520)

The clause then continues to list the other examples of just cause.

Honourable senators, I do not think anyone disputes the serious nature of sexual harassment. It is a very traumatic and disturbing situation which continually plagues our workplaces. As noted by the Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, the Honourable Mary Collins, and I quote:

Sexual harassment, of course, is against the law. The Canadian Human Rights Commission very clearly makes that point...I want to make it clear that no one, woman or man, should have to continue in employment as a victim of sexual harassment...If there is no way within their workplace to resolve the situation, they are absolutely and legitimately within their rights to leave the situation and be able to apply for unemployment insurance.

Before the introduction of this bill, a woman — because women are for the most part victims of sexual harassment — would in all likelihood not report the departure from the workplace as one of sexual harassment but would, instead, remain silent and wait out the seven to 12 weeks penalty. With the amendment contained in Bill C-113, most women will choose to remain in an intolerable workplace due to fear of having to come forward to explain their charge of sexual harassment.

I feel that this bill does not go far enough in ensuring that victims of harassment will be treated in a fair and respectable manner. Furthermore, my concern is heightened with regard to the first part of clause 23 and the remarks made by the Chief Commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission, Maxwell Yalden, to the legislative committee in the other place. Clause 23 states, and I quote:

Section 76 of the said act is amended by adding thereto the following subsections:

(6) The commission may, with the approval of the Governor in Council, make regulations

a) authorizing the chairperson of a board of referees to exclude from a hearing before the board any claimant or employer, or any representative thereof, or any person who is or who may be a witness at the hearing, when oral evidence concerning a circumstance of sexual or other harassment mentioned in paragraph 28(4)(a) is being given;

The issue pertaining to this clause is whether a person's rights are violated by giving the chairperson the authority to exclude the claimant without having the claimant's request to do so. If our intention is to protect the claimant, then I would hope we could amend this clause so that the process is one of integrity.

We often forget that we already penalize people who leave their jobs without just cause. There has always been a penalty. The Liberal Party created the unemployment insurance program. For years there was a penalty of one to six weeks,