

Supply

If he is turned down at the CEC, he has to go to the board of referees. The average delay is about two to three months if you go through the entire process.

Mr. Della Noce: No, no.

Mr. Allmand: The hon. member will have a chance to make his speech. I checked with the government officials today and these are the figures from your government. I checked this afternoon. The average delay is two to three months.

Mr. Della Noce: You listen to my speech. You may learn something.

Mr. Allmand: I have not learned very much from you and you have been here nearly eight years.

There have always been penalties. I want to make clear that we believe in a reasonable penalty. We accepted the penalty of one to six weeks which we thought was reasonable. In 1990 when the government brought in the seven to twelve week period it was getting a bit more excessive. We opposed that. To completely deny benefits to people who have paid premiums is harsh and unacceptable, especially if it is not easy to prove and it is not clear-cut both on the firing side and on the quitting side.

What is going to happen to these people? They have to live. We do not live in a country where we let people starve to death. This government, and it has done it before, is shifting the burden to the provinces and the municipalities. These people will have to go on welfare. The government is doing that all the time, shifting the burden down. In Ontario and Nova Scotia the municipalities will have to pick up the bill to pay for these people who need to support their children and so on.

By the way, the figures show that with the quitters, the people who quit, who believe they have just cause or not, get jobs in a very reasonable period of time when conditions are good for employment. When conditions are bad such as during the last year when we were in a deep recession and unemployment is over 10 per cent people just do not quit their jobs. I have them in my office all the time looking for work.

• (1820)

There may be examples of people who goof off and abuse the system, but there are many more people who

want to work. They come to our offices all the time asking us if we can help them find jobs. They do not frivolously leave their jobs. Most people do not do absolutely ridiculous things which will have them fired for cause, for reason of misbehaviour.

I described the process in the law. It came about as a result of an amendment from this side of the House, because I was the critic at the time. When the penalty was increased from seven to twelve weeks, we asked the government to at least put in a definition of just cause and it did. It put in certain things. It was not entirely what we wanted, but at least it was a step in the right direction. Now there are five reasons set out in the law.

That is good, but it is still hard to prove and the burden of proof is still on the unemployed person. In many cases it is very difficult to prove and to go to this excessive penalty is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, my time is nearly up, but let me say that these measures by this Conservative government are just another step in the gradual destruction of the unemployment insurance system.

We said during the free trade debate there would be a lot of pressure on Canada to harmonize social programs with those in the United States. Everybody knows that many states in the United States do not have any unemployment insurance. In some they have very low unemployment insurance. At the request of business this government has been trying to push down our social benefits, including our unemployment insurance system to make it similar to those in the United States.

In this bill the government is acting unilaterally in changing the program. In 1990 it did away with its contribution to the fund. Until 1990 the unemployment insurance fund had three contributors: the workers of the country, the employers of the country and the government which contributed 20 per cent. In 1989 the government had contributed \$2.8 billion to the fund. It cut that out entirely. Now the fund is solely contributed to by the workers and the employers. They should have some control over the fund. They did not have any say whatsoever in the changes we are discussing today. The government did not discuss them with the workers and the unions. It did not discuss them with the employer association.