

*Government Orders*

While no one condones cheating or unnecessary quitting, the changes in this bill are designed to catch 6 per cent while 94 per cent of UI claimants end up with reduced UI benefits. Moreover, those who quit their jobs run the risk of losing their benefits entirely if they cannot satisfy officials that they had just cause. It is clear that in reducing benefits the government is cutting the UI program simply for the sake of it.

There is no all-encompassing vision in Bill C-113 of what the UI program should be doing, nor is there an effort being made in this bill to truly reform the UI program so it can better meet the needs of the unemployed.

In 1990 when the Conservatives introduced Bill C-21, thousands of Canadians were thrown into poverty and on the welfare rolls. The percentage of unemployed workers covered by the UI program dropped from 70 per cent to 58 per cent. If the proposed changes in Bill C-113 become law, unemployed Canadians who are not eligible for UI will also be left with little choice but to turn to an already overburdened welfare system.

The opposition against Bill C-113 and its short-lived predecessor, Bill C-105, indicates that Canadians do not support the government's assault on the UI program. Many Canadians feel the proposed changes are obstacles to people who may be forced to quit their jobs because of harassment or are fired for arbitrary reasons.

Bill C-113 fails to correct the flaws in Bill C-105 with respect to just cause for quitting one's job. While definitions of what constitutes just cause are enumerated in the bill, Canadians will still have to prove that they were justified in quitting their jobs. This process will not only be time consuming, it may also be difficult to endure, especially in cases where people quit their job due to sexual harassment.

Furthermore, individuals who claim they left their jobs due to sexual harassment may find that proving such harassment took place to be quite an undertaking. Many individuals, rather than pursue their case, may choose instead to work under harassment rather than quit. Even worse, they may decide to leave their job and be denied UI benefits entirely.

Bill C-113 does not improve the UI program. It forces claimants to prove that their quitting or firing was either justified or not due to their own misconduct before they can receive UI benefits. Claimants will be considered guilty until they prove themselves innocent.

The restrictive nature of the proposed changes will cause numerous appeals which in turn will create a backlog in cases and, consequently, delays in processing UI benefits. This is hardly an example of UI reform. Moreover, there will be cases where legitimate claims will be rejected and individuals who were fired without appropriate reasons will end up without any benefits.

Rather than be preoccupied with the UI program, the government should be addressing why Canadians require UI in the first place. Canadians do not want to be on UI. They want to work. Job creation, skills development, investment in education, research and development is what Canadians want to see their government take action on.

In conclusion, I urge members of this House to reject Bill C-113. Hopefully the government will then reassess its priorities with an aim toward getting Canada and Canadians working again as my colleagues and I in the Liberal Party are committed to doing.

**Mr. René Soetens (Ontario):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to participate in this debate on the third reading of Bill C-113, an act to provide for government expenditure restraint.

This bill seeks to implement a number of restraint measures that were announced by the economic and fiscal statement tabled by the Minister of Finance in this House last December. Let me make it clear that the measures in his legislation were not introduced without careful consideration of their impact. We have put them forward because we are determined to strengthen the economic recovery now under way in Canada.

• (1755)

We are not cutting for the mere sake of cutting. We are taking these steps because deficit control is essential. It is the very foundation for Canadian investment, competitiveness and job creation. Let me remind the House that Canada is making progress in these areas. Even though too many Canadians are still unemployed, we are encouraged by the positive signs of the recovery that are visible in almost all sectors of the economy. However, the economic recovery we are experiencing here in Canada has been hampered by a very difficult global environment in which we find ourselves.