

*Oral Questions*

policies we have put in place are helping Canadians. We shall improve them because we care about them.

**Mr. Cid Samson (Timmins—Chapleau):** Madam Speaker, in an attempt to be brief I am not even going to respond to that ridiculous statement.

In recent days the minister has repudiated his director of benefit entitlement, his director of public affairs, and even his own stated interest in establishing a UI snitch line. How can we have any confidence in a minister when he repudiates not only his senior staff but also himself?

Is the minister going to do the only reasonable and sensible thing and withdraw Bill C-105?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Madam Speaker, the record is clear. At least we must give them that. They argue that the hard working people of Canada and the employers, those small businessmen and women throughout the country who work tirelessly, should pay benefits to a person who, without reason, without provocation or without any reasonable circumstance, quits his or her job.

That is the position of the NDP. We respect it, but Canadians do not accept it and this government does not accept it either.

**Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys):** Madam Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

In Atlantic Canada jobs are scarce. There just are not enough to go around. Most older workers who retire do not want to. They retire because at least they will have some income. If they did not take voluntary retirement, younger workers with young families and mortgages would be laid off and would have absolutely nothing.

Why will the minister not guarantee the older workers of this country that he will not deny them their unemployment benefits?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Madam Speaker, when the hon. member talks about older workers he could say at the same time: "Why don't you add POWA, a program that was put in place to help older workers?"

I am also from Atlantic Canada. I know the situation in our region of the country. I know the hon. member is concerned about this matter. So am I. I can assure the

hon. member and the House that nothing in Bill C-105 will prevent the government from working with firms and their employees to help them adjust to the restructuring, the rationalizing and the downsizing that are taking place.

We have already taken steps in that direction and we shall take more.

**Mr. Russell MacLellan (Cape Breton—The Sydneys):** Madam Speaker, there is an economic catastrophe happening in Atlantic Canada right now.

When the Prime Minister was president of the Iron Ore Company of Canada he offered a retirement package. Was that voluntary retirement? That sort of voluntary retirement is happening right across this country at the present time.

Why will the minister not be fair with older workers? Why will he not say that if they qualify and they have paid into the program they can have the unemployment insurance benefits?

**Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Employment and Immigration):** Madam Speaker, we have to be careful with the words we use and not to mix the issues.

When the member talks about restructuring, obviously people who are leaving their jobs under this type of restructuring are not voluntary quitters in the pure sense of the phrase.

The Government of Canada has many tools at its disposal to lend assistance to employees and employers who are adjusting to new economic realities. All these are presently being pursued in effectively positioning companies for emerging opportunities.

I know what the hon. member is talking about. There is the general issue of severance and I want Canadians to know that once the severance benefits have run out the person is eligible for UI benefits. But when we talk about restructuring or downsizing or cashing out, for example, that may be a situation which not only UI but our general adjustment policy could help these people with.

We have POWA. We have others. We are working on retaining the best adjustment measures in the world which we already have.

**Mr. Mills:** There is no money in POWA. POWA is empty.