

Supply

I do not know, maybe my hon. friends are against that. It is the same with the concept of the burden of proof. Is there not some expectation that if we are going to make allegations against others we should be able to sustain them? I submit that we should.

Hon. Warren Allmand (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce): Mr. Speaker, in this motion we condemn this Conservative government—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but I want to be informed. Will he split his time with another member?

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, excuse me. I am splitting my time with the hon. member for Kenora—Rainy River. I will speak for 10 minutes and then there will be a five minute period for questions and comments and then my colleague will do the same.

We are condemning the Conservative government in this motion for its proposal to completely deny unemployment insurance benefits to those who quit their jobs supposedly—I emphasize the word supposedly—without just cause. The government would completely deny unemployment insurance benefits to those who are fired supposedly with just cause.

This is where I take issue with the Conservative member who just spoke. If workers who have left their jobs can prove that they quit the job for just causes then they will get their unemployment insurance benefits. If people who are fired can prove that they were fired without just cause, for frivolous reasons, then they would get unemployment insurance benefits as well.

What is the problem? The problem is that workers who leave their jobs or who are fired are presumed to be guilty. They are presumed to have quit without just cause or to have been fired fairly. Workers then have the burden of proof. They must go through the very costly and time consuming appeals process to prove that they really had just cause. This could mean that the average delay may be two to three months.

People may have just cause for leaving a job. They might leave because of a personality conflict or a very subtle type of harassment, and not necessarily sexual harassment. It could be for a great number of reasons. It is not always completely black and white. They have just cause but they are presumed to be guilty as soon as they leave the job. They must go before the board of referees, which is a costly and time consuming process, and they then have two to three months with no benefits at all until they are able to prove just cause.

It is for this reason that we condemn the government. We think that completely denying benefits to people in that sort of situation is an excessively cruel and unnecessary penalty. I will go on to show it is also counterproductive economically.

I want to mention that in the package the government put forward in the economic statement before Christmas it is also reducing the benefits from 60 per cent to 57 per cent. We are at a time of excessively high double-digit unemployment for over a year and it brings in these kinds of measures which are against the unemployed. It makes it much more difficult for the unemployed. Benefits are reduced and it is much harder for those who are forced to leave their jobs and who are fired unfairly.

So that the Canadian public can be informed, we should point out that there have always been penalties in the law for those who totally abuse the system, who leave their jobs without just cause, or who are fired for misbehaviour. The penalty when we were in government was of one to six weeks and the average penalty that was given was usually about two or three weeks. This meant with the two-week waiting period there were about five weeks if you left your job without cause.

In Bill C-21, which we opposed, this Conservative government in 1990 increased that penalty from seven to twelve weeks. We opposed that for the same reasons we are opposing this. This is excessively harsh. We said that penalty was excessive. This penalty is excessive as well, especially when you consider that just cause is not always totally black and white. It is very often in the grey area and it is often difficult to prove. Because it is in a grey area and difficult to prove, to completely deny unemployment insurance benefits to those who have paid contributions for years and years is unfair, harsh and unacceptable.

We can all think of situations where you are working in a large shop, in a factory, or in a plant and you have a personality conflict with the boss, your superior. He is making you do this, picking on you, asking you to do things perhaps beyond the job description. A large number of people in this country do not have unions to fight for them. In a situation like that, finally the person quits. He is psychologically burned out, beaten down, and he quits. He is denied unemployment insurance under this law. First of all he goes to the Canadian Employment Commission and says he really had just cause and starts to prove his just cause.