

[English]

The percentage of unemployed workers receiving UI benefits has dropped from 70 per cent prior to the recession to the current level of about 58 per cent. Massive and long-term unemployment created by the recession, coupled with restrictions to UI implemented by Bill C-21, have resulted in a new class of unemployed who have exhausted their claims or are ineligible to receive benefits. Under the changes proposed by Bill C-113, the percentage of unemployed workers receiving benefits could decline to 50 per cent or less. The Americans would be happy.

[Translation]

As you know, honourable senators, Bill C-113 succeeds Bill C-105. This bill caused such a raising of hackles that the government had to react by coming up with Bill C-113, which is hardly any more acceptable. Minister Valcourt does not hide his intention to maintain the basic principles of Bill C-105. He said:

There is no question of compromising or going back on this basic principle of penalizing quitters.

This must be the sentence which shocked Senator Chaput-Rolland!

While the new provisions give increased powers to the arbitration boards to protect the privacy of victims of sexual harassment, the flaws in the first bill remain: The burden of proof is still on the victim of harassment. This provision requires victims to confront their aggressor, although many of them would gladly forgo that. Furthermore, the bill does not consider the exorbitant costs which these women must pay to prove that they have just cause for quitting. A leaked document from the federal Department of Employment and Immigration lists the options for victims of harassment, including:

— put up with the situation until a new job is found —

Put up with it!

— complain to the appropriate legal authorities —

In short, you are on your own!

In addition, section 76 of the act as amended by Bill C-113 says that the Employment and Immigration Commission may, with the approval of the Governor in Council, make regulations to apply these measures. This has little weight, since the Commission is not required to implement them.

Reacting to the opposition to Bill C-113 and the drastic provisions for those who quit, the government has tried to pull the wool over our eyes. The alleged nine new categories of just cause for quitting that were added to the five existing categories only bring together a set of legal precedents that cover 40 valid reasons. The bill adds nothing new since Employment and Immigration officials already take account of this jurisprudence. In fact, six of the forty reasons mentioned will not be in the act and one of the nine new categories, the one concerning unions and other associations of employees, was already in the Unemployment Insurance Act.

Among the countless flaws of Bill C-113, let us mention the one which provides that the commission will regulate the conditions in which someone who loses a job is entitled to unemployment insurance. The minister said that people who participate in a program to compensate those who leave voluntarily would not be considered quitters. However, there is nothing specific about it in the bill. Besides, it seems that employees who decide to take early retirement, perhaps in anticipation of losing their job, will not be entitled to unemployment insurance benefits.

[English]

• (1600)

Clearly, this measure is totally unacceptable. Mr. Valcourt has, fortunately, already backed down from the phone line that he had intended to use to denounce abusers. However, I believe he should have thrown out the entire package along with that ridiculous proposal.

Finally, I should like to underline an important fact which I believe clearly points to the government's bad faith. The government has said it was implementing Bill C-113 to curb rising costs in the unemployment insurance fund and to weed out abusers. Well, although there is presently a serious deficit in that fund, I would suggest that it is the government's own doing. In fact, in 1990, just before Bill C-21 was passed — and some of you remember that — there was a large surplus in the UI fund. At that time the government decided to finance training programs with the money in that fund. As a result, billions of dollars have been taken from the fund for training, which accounts for its considerable deficit, as we had predicted.

In the years prior to Bill C-21, the UI fund usually ran a profit during good economic times. This, in turn, helped pay for benefits for economic downturns, when the fund accrued a deficit. Now, as a result of manipulative and cynical Tory policies, the fund is running a deficit.