

Government Orders

Ms. Langan: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question because he is absolutely right in putting his question about the jurisprudence being gone.

The jurisprudence was based on former interpretations and definitions. Now we have new definitions and new interpretations. Not only do the UI bureaucrats and workers have to deal with new jurisprudence, but the poor person who is trying to put forward his or her case has nothing to rely on. It is brand new ground and it is all going to leave workers the victims because they do not have the means.

Unionized workers may be better off, but so many workers who are not unionized are going to be totally on their own in this.

Mr. Samson: Hung out to dry.

Ms. Langan: They will be hung out to dry, as my colleague says, by this government. It is shocking and deplorable. Quite frankly, I hope that some of the government members have to join the UI line in the near future and test out their Bill C-113.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, the matter before the House this evening is Bill C-113. What is this bill about exactly? It deals with three things. One part deals with the Public Sector Compensation Act, another with the transportation subsidies and a third with the Unemployment Insurance Act.

As far as the first two are concerned, I have no qualms as a member of Parliament to vote for such budgetary measures. As to the Unemployment Insurance Act, however, I have major problems that I would like to explain if I may.

In the past few weeks I have been lobbying both my party and the government to try to change Bill C-105, which was the bill to be voted on at the time.

What was in that bill that was a problem for me? In to take back certain amounts of money, this government was proposing that the benefits paid under the Unemployment Insurance Act for the next two years would amount to 57 per cent of the earnings instead of 60 per cent.

This government was proposing that employees who leave their jobs without just cause would not be entitled to UI benefits. In these two respects I have tried to change the way we would set about achieving these objectives.

I want to make myself clear. I have no problem with government wanting to limit abuse within the system. Not only do I not have a problem with that, I am actually all for it. But I do have major problems with the means to achieve this end.

Here is what we have suggested to several government members in an attempt to make this legislation more acceptable and more humane. We suggested, among other things, that people whose earnings were above average for the purpose of UI get only 57 per cent of their earnings in benefits, but those whose earnings were below average be allowed to receive the full 60 per cent in UI benefits because they are the ones who are affected the most. It will be argued that this is not a lot of money, but every little bit helps when you do not earn much.

As I told the Minister of Employment and Immigration, let us not forget that 500,000 people voluntarily left their jobs last year. Of that number, 275,000 qualified under the legislation because they met the five basic criteria. But 225,000 others did not meet those criteria and were penalized. The penalty was the loss of 7 to 12 weeks of UI benefits on top of the two-week waiting period. I think we should all realize that people do not quit their jobs without just cause, just for fun, when they are facing a penalty of 7 to 12 weeks without pay. This is a major decision. It is an important event and that kind of decision is not made lightly. Our government proposes to limit abuse by denying benefits to people who quit their jobs without just cause.

• (1830)

The basic premise of the Minister of Employment and Immigration is that these people are abusers. If I were convinced of this, I would have no hesitation in voting for this bill. To make sure my perception, interpretation and judgment were not mistaken, I checked in my community I called people who work in the field, our officers in the employment centres and their supervisors, in Dolbeau, Roberval, Alma, Chicoutimi and Jonquière.