

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Transferred for debate.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1550)

[Translation]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY S. O. 81—UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE BENEFITS

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard) moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance benefits to workers who quit their jobs or who are dismissed is "too severe", "too tough for people", "puts people in a desperate situation", "goes beyond fairness", is "extremist" and "right-wing" and is, therefore, unacceptable to the Canadian people.

He said: Mr. Speaker, in his economic and fiscal statement tabled in the House of Commons on December 2, the Minister of Finance announced changes to the Unemployment Insurance Program. Indeed the government will no longer pay any UI benefits to persons who voluntarily quit their jobs without just cause or are dismissed for misconduct. The changes announced also specify that as of April 1 all new UI recipients will get 57 per cent of their insurable earnings, compared to 60 per cent now. As the minister explained in his economic statement, the government's objective is to save \$900 million to help reduce the deficit.

At this point, I would like to remind the House, my fellow members and all Canadians listening that a couple of years ago, when this same Conservative government introduced Bill C-21 and completely withdrew from the Unemployment Insurance Program, we had a program to which employees, employers and the government each contributed one-third. The government decided to completely get out of funding the program and took \$850 million with it besides. At that time, the government said that it would invest this money in training programs. I am sure that all members have cases in their ridings where, because of these training programs over which the government has totally lost control, some people are mixed up.

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Again, the government always tries to make those in need, namely the unemployed, pay. Instead of attacking unemployment, it attacks the unemployed who are the victims of its own policies.

Not only opposition members, oppose these measures, but also a number of Conservative members. I would like to quote a few comments made by these Conservative members when the House was adjourned. For example, I read this in *La Presse* on January 15: "Come to think of it, you have to be darn rich to quit your job and be able to put up with a 7 to 12 week penalty. Now, instead of a 7 to 12 week penalty, there will be no more benefits. This is an extremely punitive measure considering the few who may have abused the system. It is overkill. In this case the one who gets it is the ordinary citizen." This quote from the January 15 issue of *La Presse* is said to be from the Conservative member for Jonquière.

I hope that this evening, when we vote, the member for Jonquière will be here, will speak in the debate in the same way that he did on January 15, and will vote. It is all very well to talk to the media and to make statements, but what counts is the vote and I hope that the member will be here this evening for the vote.

The same issue of that newspaper also quotes another Conservative member, the hon. member for Beauce, as having said: "The elected members of Parliament must try to attack the conditions which create unemployment and not the unemployed. They must go after the causes, not the victims."

I would also like to quote for you something that my friend, the Conservative member for Abitibi said, which was published in the *Journal de Montréal* on January 23, just a few days ago: "The reduction from 60 to 57 per cent of insurable earnings may seem insignificant, but when you are on UI, every dollar counts. For those making a good salary, \$20 a month is not much, but for those who have nothing else, it is very important."

I say to that hon. member, "Right on. Come here to the House to debate and convince your other colleagues to withdraw these measures that are unacceptable to Canadians." I hope to see him here debating with us this afternoon and voting in favour of my motion tonight.

Supply

As I said earlier, the government has already taken \$800 million from the system. What is the government up to? It is trying to act gradually, a little at a time, but if it continues that way it will completely destroy the unemployment insurance program. I will dwell on the provision that deprives people who quit their job voluntarily of unemployment insurance, and for my colleagues and all our listeners, I would like to give a brief historical background.

What was the situation before 1990? If someone quit his job voluntarily, without justification, or lost his job for misconduct, he could be excluded from benefits for one to six weeks.

In 1990, with Bill C-21, this penalty went from a minimum of seven weeks to a maximum of twelve weeks. Today, with this measure that the Minister of Finance proposed on December 2, the penalty for someone in the same situation will be total exclusion from benefits. He will no longer be entitled to collect UI. The minister of employment tells us that this is all meant to correct abuses. Do you think that someone would quit his job to be penalized, under the present rules, and not collect a cent in benefits or any salary for three months? Are there really so many people who do that?

Is it not rather a way for the government to evade its responsibilities in a period of severe economic crisis like this? In Quebec, unemployment in the construction industry alone is 60 per cent. Instead of being honest in an economic crisis and contributing to the Unemployment Insurance Program, the government is cutting benefits and penalizing people who need UI and are the victims of its bad economic policies.

As I said earlier, not just the Liberal and opposition members are opposed. The Quebec Liberals, for example, are also against it. Perhaps we in the opposition could be accused of playing politics on this subject. Maybe all the labour unions, the Quebec Federation of Labour, the Confederation of National Trade Unions, the Quebec teachers' union, the Mouvement Action-Chômage, the Montreal and District Labour Council, the Quebec Provincial Construction Trades Council, could even be accused of politicking, but what about the Quebec Bar Association? Will the motives of the law

professors at the University of Quebec in Montreal and other organizations that have spoken out against this bill be questioned?

Why is the Quebec Bar Association opposed to the changes? It says that thousands of genuine unemployed people will be penalized by the measures proposed by the Conservative government. Paul Carrière, president of the Quebec Bar Association, said, "The proposed changes are unrealistic in view of the conflict situations that arise in labour relations."

Have you thought of how many thousands of Canadians are afraid of losing their job in such a difficult period? Today, as we speak, can you imagine how many are afraid not only of losing their job but also of not even being able to collect unemployment benefits as of April 1? Imagine what that does to our fellow citizens, who are not responsible for the severe economic crisis we are in, which is due to the government. Instead of helping them, the government takes it away. It acts like a reverse Robin Hood, so to speak, taking from the poor and giving to the rich.

• (1600)

Mr. Carrière believes that the proposed measures may deprive thousands of unemployed workers of their unemployment insurance benefits, with no consideration for the specific circumstances of their voluntary departure or dismissal for misconduct. Everyone is in the same boat. It just shows how cruel and insensitive these changes are.

Under the present system, when someone leaves his job voluntarily or is dismissed for misconduct, the Unemployment Insurance Act imposes a disqualification period of 7 to 12 weeks. However, there are some reasons that may be justified in the course of an appeal process, such as sexual or other harassment. How do we prove this?

A person may have to accompany a spouse to another place of residence, for instance. Monday, I put the following question to the Prime Minister: What happens to an employee in James Bay who has to—

An hon. member: He is covered.

Mr. Gagliano: The hon. member says he is covered. How? It is easy to say he is covered. An employee gets a phone call from his wife, who says: Listen, you have to come home because we have some problems here. When the employee decides to go home, the employer says: No, you are going to stay here, and if don't, you won't be entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. This situation is not covered in the act. If the member for the Conservative Party is so sure it is covered in the act, as the Prime Minister was, I suggest he read the letters they got from the Quebec Bar Association, and then maybe he will rise in caucus and in the House and tell the government: You are wrong, withdraw these measures because they are unfair.

Of course there are cases of abuse in any system and under any legislation. We have to correct this. We should not try to correct abuse by creating another kind of abuse. We must find a way to use our laws to deal with certain situations if there is abuse. I am sure the minister and his officials have never been able to determine the extent of abuse, if there was any, in the dismissal process.

Instead of treating everyone exactly the same, he could have taken a different approach and ensured that in these difficult times, when, unfortunately, a person loses his job, or in case of incompatibility, which does happen, or when there are certain reasons not covered by the Act, that a person can explain his position and receive benefits.

The Quebec Bar Association and a professor from the University of Quebec in Montreal say that if the government goes ahead with these changes, the judicial system will be flooded with cases, so much so that it will cost more than it does now. We saw what happened in the immigration sector with the refugees, because that cost a fortune. There are still many problems. Why not listen to people like the president of the Quebec Bar Association, since he has some very valid reasons? I repeat, we can hardly be accused of political partisanship since the Quebec Bar Association itself says these measures are unfair.

I see a number of my colleagues from Quebec who have made statements—I quoted some of them—who will take part in the debate this afternoon and will vote on the motion and stand up for their convictions. To give them some encouragement, I will quote the Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Conservative Quebec lieutenant, who told members and reporters, and I quote: "Conservative members are not just there to vote

with the government, without saying a word. They have their own opinions and they can express them". Express your opinions, express your convictions, and vote accordingly. I am sure that this evening, Canadians from coast to coast will be watching and will remember what you are about to do.

[English]

I just want to leave a few numbers with the House. It is inappropriate to have these measures at this time. I will relate my figures to the province I represent, which is the province of Quebec.

The number of beneficiaries in Quebec rose by 28,200 between October and November. It was 407,110 according to Statistics Canada, which is a government agency. One in three Canadians receiving UI benefits is a Quebecer. In Montreal, the ranks of UI beneficiaries swelled by nearly 4,000 in November according to Statistics Canada. There were 160,650 Montrealers on benefits in November. That was 3,960 more than in October and 2,050 more than in November 1991.

Montreal's long-term unemployment has meant that there will still be 25,380 more Montrealers collecting UI benefits than Torontonians in November. Nearly one in seven Canadians on UI is a Montrealer and those are just the official statistics. What about those who are not on the UI list anymore? What about those who are on social welfare or those who do not even qualify for social welfare who are trying to sell their houses and cannot even do that because the market is not there?

At the same time when everybody is crying and in difficulty, the government has the guts or the courage to propose an unjust program. It should never have been presented in the House. December 2 was just before Christmas. This shows the insensitivity of this government. That was its Christmas gift to Canadians. The government said that for any reason one quits a job—valid reasons but not necessarily justifiable in the law—one will not get any unemployment insurance.

I think this measure should be withdrawn immediately. This has been recommended not only by different unions, opposition members and a good dozen of Quebec Tory MPs, but also by the Quebec Bar Association that has no political interests and speaks in terms of its members and the law. The association says clearly in its statement that this law should not be implemented and that those rules should be withdrawn. I hope that the government will do that tonight by withdrawing those measures or as soon as possible.

Supply

In order to do that, I implore the Quebec members who spoke against these measures to vote on my motion tonight so that we can send a message to the government. Perhaps tomorrow morning, or in same the evening, the minister of employment could withdraw those measures and let Canadians hope to have some relief by receiving unemployment insurance benefits if they have some misfortune.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Côté (Richmond—Wolfe): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised to hear what my colleague from Saint-Léonard is saying. I can hardly question his being a sensitive person, but he claims that the government has just destroyed unemployment insurance and is preparing to literally kill our unemployed people who are indeed in a very frail condition.

I would like to set the record straight on certain points, and this is very important because our fellow Canadians are listening. According to what I am hearing, it is obvious that unemployment insurance is about to be abolished. I must admit that, based on what my colleague just said, we are left with the impression that our unemployed are being "killed" by the government. I want to correct those two impressions.

• (1610)

First of all, I want to point out that the purpose of this bill is to bring discipline to the system and to put abusers in their place. The government certainly does not have the dangerous, diabolical, sadistic intention of penalizing the unemployed who voluntarily quit their job. I insist that it is a matter of taking advantage of new conditions and setting new parameters to keep abusers from bilking a system that is basically sound. Do you know that last year 225,000 people quit their jobs voluntarily and, in addition, 40,000 were dismissed for misconduct? Those are not the frail, sincere, honest unemployed he was referring to.

We must therefore set the record straight. Besides, the bill does not give any new reasons. They are the same as before. Nothing has changed from Bill C-21. Reasons for leaving like sexual harassment, dangerous conditions, child care, moving to follow a spouse to another location

and discrimination are all there already. Absolutely nothing has changed. We just want to target those who take advantage of the system. Saying that you agree with protecting the abusers, if you allow me, is like letting a bandit continue to move around freely or letting a thief continue to steal, on the pretext that it would cost too much and they should be given the benefit of the doubt. Mr. Speaker, you and I and all hon. members are contributing to the \$1 billion that goes to those who abuse the system. Should we put up with it? No.

I regret that my colleague's sincerity is tainted by back-room games that I do not agree with.

Mr. Gagliano: First of all, Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague challenged my statement to the effect that his government's ultimate aim is to destroy the UI program. He says it is not so.

My hon. colleague will know that, with these measures which have not been enacted yet but are about to and those taken in 1990 through Bill C-21, within two years, this government has totally withdrawn from Unemployment Insurance, taking away money that is not even its own, since the program is actually financed by employee and employer contributions. It took away \$850 million in 1990 and \$900 million in 1992. When you tell me that you want to protect the Unemployment Insurance Program, I think that you are doing a fine job.

In the figures he quoted about people who are said to have quit their jobs voluntarily or on grounds of misconduct, my hon. colleague failed to mention how many of those have appealed and won, and how long that process took. They are not all defrauding the system.

The problem with this government is that it puts everybody in the same bag. Some people do have reasonable grounds, but with this bill they will not be able to defend themselves. They will have to go to court, use the judiciary system, and that will be very costly and time-consuming. The UI arbitration board is an internal process. It will go by a legislation with clear provisions relating to an employee who quits his or her job voluntarily. Any employee who does not qualify under these provisions will not receive UI benefits. Even the bar says that will clog the judiciary system. They say so, not I.

Supply

My hon. colleague should read the letter the Minister of Finance received from the Quebec Bar Association, signed by its president, and look at the specific arguments set forth there.

I would like to add that not all those who quit their jobs are trying to defraud the UI system, as my hon. colleague was referring to.

Mr. Speaker, 43 per cent found work within 10 weeks in 1991. Certainly those are not the ones who have abused the system. There are of course some in every system, but to claim that there are over 200,000, that is a bit much. When the minister says that, of the \$600 million he wants to save, over \$200 goes to people who abuse the UI system, I think that is an exaggeration. As the hon. member for Jonquière said: "You are out to kill a fly with a gun." I think it is a fine choice of words. Perhaps the hon. member could consult his colleague from Jonquière.

Mr. Guy Saint-Julien (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member for Saint-Léonard about his motion. I know the Quebec Bar Association said: "In the light of the jurisprudence". Currently, the act covers five valid grounds for voluntary departure. Jurisprudence provides another forty. It says here: "It would appear that in a number of situations where the employer demonstrated there were valid grounds for voluntary departure, as opposed to any justification, the umpire was able to impose the minimum penalty".

In his speech, the hon. member said it would create a considerable backlog in the judicial system. The hon. member is right, because we have no idea of the number of appeals now before the umpire. I know that in Abitibi, in Val d'Or, there are 16 appeals pending. The umpire may hear the appeals in six months or a year from now, or it may even take two years. It is a lengthy process. We know that Bill C-105 will increase the number of appeals before the umpire.

By the way, this evening I know I will abstain from voting on this motion, for the simple reason that in 1978, the Minister of Finance at the time reduced unemployment insurance benefits from 66-2/3 to 60 per cent. However, I do have the following question: Could the hon. member tell me how many appeals are now before the umpire in Montreal and Quebec generally? Does he know how many?

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I am sorry to hear the hon. member will abstain this evening. As I said

at the beginning of my speech, it is all very well to make statements to the media in our ridings, but where it counts is here. I have great respect for the hon. member, and I really regret his decision. I hope that by eight o'clock he will have had time to reconsider.

The Montreal region is a large one. He repeated the point I made that these measures will flood the system with cases, at a time when the system is already overloaded. In the Montreal region, there are about 200,000 appeal cases pending. Considering the number of unemployed workers today the figures for which are constantly changing because there are always new cases, some cases are dealt with and other cases come back, and so forth. I cannot give him a specific answer right now. After April 1, when these measures are implemented, it will be a disaster, and for that reason alone, I ask the hon. member to reconsider and to vote in favour of the motion.

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, as far political rhetoric goes, this takes the cake. The opposition motion says: "That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance benefits to workers who quit their jobs—". That is just not true. Bill C-105 contains no reference to cutting off unemployment insurance benefits to those who quit their jobs. It says "to those who leave their employment without just cause". Right from the start, this motion fails to reflect the real situation and misrepresents the facts. For these reasons I urge all members of this House to vote against the motion.

• (1620)

I have a short question for the hon. member. He alluded to some of my colleagues in the Conservative Party who expressed reservations about the bill. I can inform him they did so to improve the way the Unemployment Insurance Act is administered. Today, government members are making a number of very practical and valid suggestions for improving the way the Unemployment Insurance Act is implemented. What is the opposition prepared to suggest? Instead of this constant criticism, what are those members prepared to suggest to improve the Unemployment Insurance Act? Instead of criticizing and condemning this legislation, it is high time the opposition and the Liberal Party decided, once and for all, to suggest some concrete alternatives for dealing with the problems of this country.

Supply

Mr. Gagliano: Mr. Speaker, I am glad to hear the hon. member has a few questions and is critical of the wording of the motion.

Perhaps he should talk to his colleague from Jonquière, whom I quoted literally. Those are not my words. Everything in quotes was said by his colleagues and, more specifically, his colleague from Jonquière. If he does not agree with the hon. member for Jonquière, it is not my problem. My motion expresses what his colleague said. The hon. member is laughing. He just doesn't get it. His colleague from Jonquière is condemning the government. If anyone accuses me of political rhetoric, I can say it was said by a member of his own caucus. Maybe he should talk to him.

[English]

Hon. Pauline Browes (Minister of State (Employment and Immigration)): Mr. Speaker, this is the first opportunity I have had to speak in the House of Commons since being appointed to the position of Minister of State for Employment and Immigration. I am very pleased to join my colleague, the Minister of Employment and Immigration, in this ministry and I want to thank Prime Minister Mulroney for appointing me to this position.

I am pleased to respond to the motion concerning the government's policy on the unemployment insurance changes. As we know, Canada's unemployment insurance program has been in existence for some 52 years. We have offices across the country. We have excellent employees who administer this program. Canadians are really quite familiar with this program and it serves as tremendous purpose.

I suppose each of us in our own communities has heard of or knows of someone who has abused the unemployment insurance system, who simply quit because they did not want to continue to work.

Is it fair for those who pay UI premiums to support people who choose not to work? What is equally important is that the government will demonstrate that the proposed changes will be administered fairly with the benefit of the doubt continuing to be the rule of the day.

Here is the real question. Do Canadians who are working—some 12,240,000—want to support those who quit their jobs for no good reason? I believe that Canadians are fair-minded people who find it unacceptable to support those who do not want to work.

Ask Canadians who believe that UI is there for protection against unemployment and not a substitute for employment whether they believe that the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act are too severe, too tough, unfair, extreme or unacceptable. The answer would be a resounding no.

Canadians would reply that it is unfair, tough, and unacceptable to support people who do not want to work. What is fair is to ensure that UI is there for those who need it. The government believes and has repeatedly stated in recent days that it is unfair to ask Canadians to subsidize those who quit their jobs voluntarily in what is a very tight job market today. It is even more unfair to misrepresent these changes.

As members of the House of Commons are aware, these changes to the unemployment insurance provisions affect only those who voluntarily leave their jobs without just cause or who are fired for misconduct.

Through the UI program our government remains committed, as always, to supporting those who leave their jobs with just cause. Thanks in part to the self-serving hand wringing or plain misinformation coming from certain quarters the question, of just cause is one of several areas of these constructive changes around which unjustified fears have arisen.

Just cause has always applied and will continue to apply to five specific areas set out in the UI legislation. These areas that constitute just cause include leaving a job because of discrimination on a prohibited ground of discrimination within the meaning of the Canadian Human Rights Act; an obligation to accompany a spouse: if someone is accompanying a spouse to another part of the country that is just cause; an obligation to care for a child; working conditions that constitute a clear danger to health and safety; and sexual harassment: if someone is sexually harassed in the work place and leaves his or her job that is just cause.

Just cause in cases of sexual harassment is very sensitive and is an important issue for us to discuss but one where unfounded fears have been propagated. The truth is that these changes will bring more sensitivity than ever before to the situation of people, usually women, who feel that they have been sexually harassed on the job.

We are outraged that persons are sexually harassed. Those persons who take the option of quitting will receive all the benefit of the doubt when they make a claim for UI.

The government recognizes that these new measures go further than any previous penalties imposed on volunteer quitters. The Canada Employment Centre staff members who deal with UI claimants are experienced professionals. They are sensitive to the circumstances of the situation. We know that we will have to administer these provisions with great care. I can assure my hon. colleagues that as well as drawing upon their years of experience CEC staff members will receive additional training and assistance to respond to and implement these new provisions.

To ensure that every claimant is treated fairly and equitably before the legislation becomes law all staff members will be trained in how to deal with the implementation process. The instructors will ensure that staff members understand the letter and the spirit of the legislation. Specific training will include how to process claims under the new legislation, how to zero in on the relevant facts of each situation, how to apply the principles and the practices of adjudication and how to evaluate the information when making a decision.

We know that it is not enough for staff members to simply understand the new law. It is equally important that they are aware of the sensitivities around these issues. For this reason all staff members who will work with claimants will be given awareness training in the area of human relations and to enhance understanding of claimants who fall under one of the five areas of just cause. This is particularly true in the area of sexual harassment.

• (1630)

I want to stress that the directive of the CEC staff is absolutely clear on the issue of sexual harassment as just cause. The guidelines for field officers state:

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In cases where all things are considered equal, the benefit of the doubt will be given to the claimant and, thus, tip the scale in his/her favour.

The directive could not possibly be clearer. This means that UI benefits will not be denied because of a dispute between an employer and an employee. When a woman goes to a UI office she will be assured of having a woman claims officer if she so wishes. It is worth noting that 75 per cent of UI claims agents are women, and that is very reassuring for the women who are making those claims.

It is also worth noting that since Bill C-21 was introduced in 1990 there has not been one written complaint about the department's administrative rulings regarding sexual harassment. In that time there has been only one appeal and that was from an employer who disagreed with approval of a sexual harassment claim. The employer lost the appeal.

Despite the impression created by the opposition's misleading claims the UI agent's role is to collect all the facts necessary to make a fair decision. The agent will first get all the information possible from the claimant and find out what steps the claimant took to remedy the situation before taking the final step of quitting his or her job. The agent will then endeavour to hear the employer's side of the story.

The evidence the agents collect will not always be clear-cut. Clearly, there will be occasions when the evidence from one side will contradict the evidence from the other and it may be impossible to tip the scales one way or the other. In such situations the agent must draw on experience, judgment and common sense to reach a conclusion. As I have already stated, the benefit of the doubt will go to the claimant. This policy applies not only to people who quit their jobs voluntarily but to those whose employers claim they were fired for misconduct.

This commitment to making a fair decision may come as a surprise to some of the opposition party members who drafted the motion before the House tonight. They would have the House believe that the UI agents accept at face value any apparent evidence which could result in a person being denied their rightful benefits. This is just not the case.

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There is also a comprehensive system of appeal and other services available to a claimant who may be denied benefits. If benefits are denied the claimant is given the reason in writing. The claimant is also told how to appeal to the board of referees. A pamphlet explaining the appeals process is automatically sent to the claimant. If the claimant asks for help the Canada Employment Centre gives it willingly.

The staff will explain the reason for the decision, the appeals process and its time-frames and give advice on preparing arguments before the board of referees. Copies of the Unemployment Insurance Act regulations, court decisions and commission policy on adjudication are available to claimants at CEC offices. Claimants are not faced with an adversarial or accusatory atmosphere when they indicate why they quit their jobs.

Giving the benefit of the doubt to claimants who believe they have just cause is a firmly established tradition within the administration of the UI program.

Any member of this House or anyone else who has taken the time to actually look at the administration of the UI act would be aware that it is interpreted fairly and in favour of claimants. Now the government has, particularly in the case of sexual harassment, come out even more vigorously on the side of those who leave work with what they feel is a just cause.

To characterize these amendments as regressive or unfair to those who quit with just cause or who lose their job through no fault of their own is to do a great disservice to what are carefully considered and necessary changes to our UI program. These changes are not an attack on the unemployed. They are an attack on unemployment. The only losers will be those who choose to be unemployed, not those who are unemployed through no fault of their own.

The changes reinforce the UI program's fundamental mandate to provide Canadians with temporary income and the option of special training while looking for work. Let there be no misunderstanding. It is these Canadians, including those who leave their jobs with just cause, who deserve to remain the priority of a more focused, more cost-effective unemployment insurance program.

I believe that the opposition is doing a great disservice to the country by using this mechanism of the House to propagate erroneous and misleading information.

Mr. Ken Hughes (MacLeod): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the opportunity to ask questions and make very brief comments on this important issue today.

Watching what is going on here today intrigues me. It is quite clear that the Liberal Party of Canada is playing a very transparent, shallow game of shameful, partisan politics. It is shocking and not worthy of what was once a great party in this nation. It is clearly stooping to very low measures.

When I went home to my riding in Alberta after the December 2 statement by the Minister of Finance, who also happens to be an Albertan, I heard from many people about the initiatives regarding the unemployment insurance system. The remarkable thing is that the most common comment I heard was: "You mean we pay people when they quit voluntarily?" Many people did not know that. They thought that was something which should not be done.

We are talking about the unemployment insurance fund. It is not for people who choose to cease working for a company or who choose to become unemployed simply because they want to. It is an unemployment insurance fund that should be there for people during times of need. There is plenty of need out there. This government is trying to ensure that the support is there for people who need it if the time comes and they lose the opportunity to be employed. It is a question of fairness, a question that is very important.

I am glad that we are debating this matter today. I wonder if the minister could add to the comments she has already made about what circumstances there are to protect people and make sure that they are dealt with fairly under the existing provisions. Could the hon. minister respond to those concerns?

Mrs. Browes: Mr. Speaker, I welcome those comments. We had a few weeks to be back in our constituencies to hear firsthand from Canadians how they feel about various issues. I have to agree with my colleague that I received the same kinds of comments that he did in Alberta.

People were surprised that people actually got paid when they just quit their jobs. The hon. member is quite right. People are saying: "Well, listen. It is a pretty tough market out there. I value my job and I am not prepared to pay for somebody who just decides that they are going to quit".

• (1640)

A person who does quit his or her job for those reasons I outlined—discrimination, mobility, looking after a child, sexual harassment, unsafe conditions in the work place, health reasons—do so with just cause. If you leave your job for any of those reasons and believe you should be getting unemployment insurance, you will. An application for a claim is made to the unemployment insurance office. As I mentioned, you are entitled to have an agent of the same gender to speak to so a woman who has been sexually harassed in the work place will be able to give her story to a female agent.

The claim is made. If there is a dispute with the employer, the benefit of the doubt goes to the claimant. If there is a denial, there is an opportunity to appeal. We are finding that the vast majority of cases can be handled with the agents. A very sensitive approach is taken in our unemployment insurance offices. The public servants administering this unemployment insurance program need to be commended for their outstanding work.

Mr. George S. Baker (Gander—Grand Falls): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister could tell us what is wrong with the present restrictions imposed by this government back in 1990.

If someone quits or is let go, or quits without just cause—which is not synonymous with just reasons, what is wrong with the present law that says that you lose your unemployment insurance from seven to twelve weeks and your benefit also drops from 60 per cent down to 50 per cent for all of these borderline cases, some of which have been reversed by the Federal Court of Canada? What is wrong with the present restrictions? Why simply remove for all time unemployment insurance benefits for all of these borderline cases that are determined in our courts, a great many of which are under debate today in appeal to the Federal Court or to the Supreme Court of Canada?

Mrs. Browes: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the member brings this up. I was looking back at the *Hansard* debates at the time Bill C-21 was being debated, when the issue of just cause was being brought forward.

Supply

I notice that the members of the Liberal Party voted against the just cause issue. They voted against this being included in the bill, which I was really quite surprised about. I notice from *Hansard* that the member who asked the question did not vote that day. Perhaps he did not agree with his party on this issue, but the members of the opposition did not want to include just cause in Bill C-21, which is quite an unbelievable situation.

Mr. Baker: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sorry, questions and comments are now terminated. Debate, the hon. member for Timmins—Chapleau.

Mr. Cid Samson (Timmins—Chapleau): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to enter into this debate to discuss the Liberal opposition day motion. For the record, in the opinion of this House the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please. I have just heard a comment from one of the members that the Chair is defending somebody. I am not defending anybody. The time was 10 minutes in questions and comments and she had her 10 minutes.

Mr. Samson: Mr. Speaker, I ask you to note the time on the clock and that my time would start now as opposed to a few minutes ago.

I rise in support of the Liberal opposition motion this evening because I feel that there are some great deficiencies in what the government is proposing to introduce. I would like to state for the House the wording of the motion we are debating.

That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance benefits to workers who quit their jobs or who are dismissed is "too severe", "too tough for people", "puts people in a desperate situation", "goes beyond fairness", is "extremist" and "right-wing" and is, therefore, unacceptable to the Canadian people.

It is interesting—more than anything else—to note where these quotations and adjectives came from. They came from the Quebec backbenchers of the Conservative Party. They are the members for Jonquière, Beauce and Abitibi, to name only three. There were others.

Supply

Of these three members—some of whom were here—one said: “Well, I am going to abstain from the vote”. The other has risen to defend the position that we have to do something to “catch these cheaters”, as they like to refer to them.

As far as I am concerned, when we talk about cheaters in a system I think we had better be very careful how we choose our words because in the majority of cases where these so-called cheaters have appealed their cases, the decisions have been overturned. In fact they were not cheaters at all.

This government, with the legislation that it is proposing to introduce at second reading, is going to cast a huge net into the ocean of workers. It might catch two fish.

Unemployment insurance is just that. It is a safety net for workers who become unemployed. They pay into it and they should expect and be entitled to get something out of it when the need is there. I do not think there are very many people in Canada who quit their jobs without just cause.

Let us talk about just cause. Is it just cause if a person wants to increase and better their lot in life by moving on to other employment? They leave their current employer and they go to another employer who perhaps is offering better opportunities for improvement, better wages, better benefits and better conditions.

Let us say an employee goes to a new employer and for some unforeseen reason is not there long enough to establish the number of weeks required to collect unemployment should the case arise. Let us say he does become unemployed. He cannot apply for unemployment under those terms because he has not been there long enough. He cannot go back and claim on the old claim from his old employer because he left without just cause. That is not covered as one of the five or six reasons for leaving for just cause. It is not covered. Shake your head all you want, but it is not there.

Employees do not have the right to try to advance themselves. Under the current conditions, they can do it because at least they will only be penalized 7 or 12 weeks. Under the other conditions, they will lose all benefits.

• (1650)

In terms of sexual harassment, the minister was here a few minutes ago and pleaded emphatically that the benefit of the doubt will go to the worker. However, for goodness' sake, what does the worker have to go through in order to state his or her case?

An hon. member: One must prove it.

Mr. Samson: Absolutely. The minister is back in the House and I am glad that she is. It is very important that we establish what it is that this worker has to go through. A person is sexually harassed by the employer. The employer sees that the employee no longer wants to co-operate with the sexual harassment and does not want to put up with it any more so he says: “You are gone. You are fired”. Who fills out the separation papers? Oh my, gee whiz, it is the employer, is it not? It sure is. What do they put on there? They say: “I sexually harassed this employee and this employee no longer wanted to put up with my nonsense so I fired her for sexual harassment”. Do you think the employer is going to do that? Of course not. Let us not be silly.

The employer will fill out the separation paper and write “fired”. The counsellor at the employment office will look at this when the person applies for unemployment benefits and will say: “You were fired. Why were you fired?” This person now has to go through the indignation, the embarrassment and the degradation of having to bare his or her soul to a complete stranger and explain why they were fired or why they quit.

An hon. member: Shameful.

Mrs. Browes: It is embarrassing for the employer too.

Mr. Samson: The minister states that it is embarrassing for the employer. However, the onus of proof is on the employee, not the employer.

Therefore, we go through the whole appeal process which takes aeons. Ask anybody who has ever had a UI appeal. This person has to bare his or her soul again and again and again to any number of strangers. Give me a break. There is no way that a worker should have to go through that kind of indignation and embarrassment to file an unemployment insurance claim. It is insurance.

Supply

I would ask the members on the other side a question. How many constituents have come to your office and said: "I and my employer have paid into a long-term disability insurance plan and I am being deprived of it."? What do you do? You get on the phone and you start making calls on behalf of your constituent because this constituent is entitled to benefits from an insurance plan that he or she and his or her employer have paid into and you expect them to get benefits. If you say you do not expect them to get benefits, then I venture to say that you are not telling the truth. Therefore, why is it any different with unemployment insurance that people pay into?

Why are this government and these members trying to tell us that the victims of unemployment are the bad guys in all of this? They are victims. They do not want to be unemployed in most cases—in all cases as far as I am concerned—because if they quit or are fired the employer decides the reason and the employee has to prove otherwise. They are entitled to the benefits.

I held a press conference today in 130-S. I had witnesses at this press conference from my riding who have been victims of the unemployment insurance system. They have appealed the decision. Let me tell you that the whole process started last May and their first appeal was in November. That appeal has been denied. Now they have to appeal to the umpire. Their appeal, along with those of others, will go on the waiting list.

There is another case where I am entering into my second anniversary of waiting for a hearing with an umpire. These constituents are here. They are parents. They have five children and they have no income. The husband has been denied benefits. He has been denied welfare because he is on an OSAP loan. It was not a grant but a loan. He cannot collect anything. Fear not, the appeal system is there for you. Thank God there are not that many more waiting for an appeal. The fact remains there are far too many who have to wait two years for an appeal.

We had witnesses at this press conference today from *Action Chômage* in Montreal who brought four typical cases with them that they talked about. The people went through the appeal system and the original decision was overturned. They won the appeal.

It was asked at the press conference what the percentage was of wins and losses on appeals. They said they won about 80 per cent of them. In the meantime, the point is that people have to wait. They have no income. Also, as a result of being denied UI they are being denied welfare because the welfare system cannot subsidize UI.

One other witness there—a very important one—was the president of the unemployment insurance employees' union that represents the front line workers who have to administer these kinds of legislation. They are the ones who have to answer the constituents who come in and say they have case. The front line workers have to apologize and say their hands are tied. They have to cope with the legislation.

The minister said tonight that we should not fear. These people will be trained, coached and taught to cope and deal with these cases.

The problem is that their work force has been reduced by about 25 per cent. They are overworked. They are under extreme stress. They lose patience. They get short tempered. Let me tell you that they are people and I do not blame them. They are experiencing a lot of difficulty right now. There is massive unemployment in this country.

When we look at this piece of legislation and when we look at what is going on in the country, I think we should stop attacking the unemployed. The reason they are unemployed is thanks to the current government and its economic policies. Why does it not spend as much effort in job creation?

It wants to take shots at the unemployed. It wants to change legislation. It wants to reduce benefits from 60 per cent to 57 per cent. It is attacking the unemployed. Why does it not attack the problem of a lack of jobs?

There is another announcement from CP that they are going to lay off another 1,600. How many more companies are going to close? How many more thousands of people will be laid off?

I wonder what it is that this government really wants to do.

Supply

I heard two petitions being presented this afternoon and they interested me. One was from the Peterborough area, and one was from the Toronto area. The petitions were to encourage and ask the government to live up to its commitment of November 24 though unanimous consent in the House to seek the elimination of poverty among children. Two Conservative members tabled these petitions.

How can this government say on the one hand it is trying to eliminate poverty for children and then turn around and say that it is going to cut UI benefits for recipients from 60 per cent to 57 per cent?

What is that going to do to the buying power of those poor people who are on unemployment insurance? What is that going to do to my constituents who have five children and are losing 3 per cent? The real impact is 5 per cent.

• (1700)

In their words that means a bag of milk less or they would have to make a decision. Who is not going to eat this week?

Sounds pretty drastic. To us in this House, 3 per cent may not mean a whole lot. It might mean \$20. To those people who are getting less than \$300 a week, with families to support, rent to pay, it is an awful lot of money. Let us not downgrade the importance of maintaining the benefits we have.

Let me state one thing. Although I support this motion tonight, I do not forget the impact of the Liberal motion back in 1978 when the Liberals reduced benefits from 66.75 per cent to 60 per cent, with the full support of the current government. That was even more drastic than the present reduction.

We have to look at ways of trying to make things better for Canadians. We have to look at ways and means of ensuring that Canadians have an opportunity to work. The reason I am supporting this motion this evening is that these changes to UI will not do anything to create employment.

I have heard it said and I have read in *Hansard* from previous debates that this is a form of encouraging people to stay at work. Can you imagine, this is a form of encouraging people to stay at work because we are going to penalize them now. We are going to penalize them because they want better working conditions. They want to change jobs. They are being sexually harassed and they have to tolerate totally undesirable conditions. Now they are going to be forced to stay in those conditions.

It is true simply because of the indignation that they are going to have to go through to prove their case. You

have to understand that. If you do not understand that you do not understand anything. They have got to go through the process. Tell me, show me and introduce me to an employer who will admit to sexual harassment and I will kiss your feet.

What about another case where an employee works and—

Mrs. Browes: That's not true.

Mr. Samson: Only the feet. What about the case where an employee in a unionized shop stands up for the rights of a fellow employee. He knows that his fellow employee is being discriminated against or for whatever reason, the employer is throwing a barrage of insults at him, totally uncaring about the employee's feelings. He stands up for that co-worker's rights. As a result, he gets fired. Do you think the employer is going to say on his separation slip that he stood up for the rights of his fellow employee. He is going to say: "Okay, give him his benefits". There is no way that an employer is going to admit that he or she was wrong.

I urge and I plead with all those Conservative members who believe as we do that there are strong wrongs in the language of the current Bill C-105. I urge them to support this motion to ensure that there is some fairness and some equality for unemployed workers in this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the comments made by my colleague from the New Democratic Party and I must say that I am very surprised by some of his statements which I consider totally unfounded and which could be misleading for the public. I heard these allegations today and I am surprised to see my colleague participate in this sort of exercise.

For example, he made a statement to the effect that a worker who is employed for a period of eight weeks, then decides to change jobs to improve his lot or for any other reason and after eight more weeks, is laid off because there is no work or for any other reason, would not be eligible for UI benefits. I ask my colleague: Is he really serious when he makes such a statement? So far as we know, this is totally unfounded. This is not a true statement; it is utterly false. I trust that the hon. member was mistaken when he said that, perhaps because he is not familiar with this issue, and did not do this intentionally. I would appreciate it if the member gave us an explanation, because this is a totally unfounded statement.

Supply

Second, there is the idea that we are after the unemployed. Earlier, my colleague said, why are you going after the unemployed? Why not tackle the problem of unemployment instead? Has my New Democrat friend forgotten that, thanks to the initiatives taken by this government since Bill C-21, more than \$3 billion are now available to the unemployed in this country for training which will help them find a better job? Those are concrete measures, not just empty words. Why have we done this? We did it because we believe that unemployed workers do not necessarily want UI benefits. Rather, they want to find a good job through proper training and this is what we, as a government, are trying to provide for these workers.

I now come to the third and last point. If my colleague was serious when he talked about sexual harassment, he would not insult the victims.

Basically, what the NDP proposes as policy to fight sexual harassment is to pay unemployment insurance to the victims so that they will shut up. The NDP wants to pay those people to keep silent. If my colleague was at all serious when he talked about sexual harassment, he would ask the minister to implement a process so that from the time UI benefits are paid to a victim of sexual harassment, this process would enable us to go to the root of the problem. If the causes of this sexual harassment are not dealt with by the employer, if no corrective measures are taken, then penalties should be imposed.

It is totally revolting to use the victims of sexual harassment to oppose Bill C-105. Incidentally, when my colleague asks us to reject Bill C-105, he is also asking us to vote against his salary freeze.

Mr. Samson: Mr. Speaker, where do I begin? We are not talking about my salary here this evening; we are talking about a part of this bill. You have included this in a bill which covers several issues, in order to hide the impact of this legislation on the workers.

You asked me a question at the beginning. I am not sure if I understood well but I will try to give you an answer. If I did not understand correctly, I apologize. For several years, the person I was referring to had a job where there was discrimination of one kind or another.

That person decided to change jobs to get a better quality of life, better working conditions, better wages or whatever. For one reason or another, that person was laid off at the second place of employment, before having accumulated enough weeks to be eligible for UI benefits. On the one hand, the person could not work the required number of weeks in the second job to be eligible and on the other hand that person cannot go back to the first job because of leaving it without just cause.

Mr. Robitaille: That is false.

• (1710)

Mr. Samson: Well, if it is false, I apologize, as I said, but I do not think it is false. This is the situation as it exists.

[*English*]

An hon. member: It carries on.

Mr. Samson: No, it does not carry on. The fact is that if he does not, he cannot qualify in the second job because he did not work long enough. He did not leave for just cause. He has to prove that he left for just cause.

It is true. We can say it is true. It is not true forever and we are not going to agree.

[*Translation*]

That is the reason.

[*English*]

Mr. Jesse Flis (Parkdale—High Park): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the hon. member for Timmins—Chapleau is supporting this motion. He gave his reasons why; because many of the quotes in the motion are quotes from hon. members of the Conservative Party. They made these quotes in their home province of Quebec and elsewhere. I think this speaks very highly of them. It means that there are some members on the other side who do care for the unemployed. To show credibility, I hope they will stand up with us tonight and vote for this motion.

I am pleased the hon. member gave the example of someone shifting to another job for a higher paying job or to improve themselves on the job. It shows he studied the motion and UI bill very carefully.

Supply

A young constituent came to me just last week. She is working in accounting. The employer very subtly is just adding on a number of hours. She is being asked to work in the evening. She is being asked to work Saturdays. She is now putting in 70 and more hours per week. She is at the stage where she wants to leave. If she does not, she may have a mental breakdown or something, the stress is so high. There is no union that will guarantee her time and a half after 40 hours. Here is a person is being forced to leave by the employer, a good worker, but she is afraid now that she will not be covered.

The minister did give us the five categories. I looked at the five categories and this person would not fall into any one of those five categories.

I wonder if the hon. member for Timmins—Chapleau sees a category that would cover this constituent who really is being harassed and persecuted by an employer, really has to leave and she will leave without any UI compensation.

Mr. Samson: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. He is absolutely right. As we have pointed out time and time again, this is the case. One has to prove just cause.

The five conditions the minister outlined do not cover that particular case. It is going to be left up to the discretion of the counsellors when the employee applies for unemployment insurance. Those counsellors in some cases are working under a lot of stress. They are working long hours. They are trying to do their best. They have legislation. They have thousands of workers that they interview over the period of a year. They will not be able to cope. As the minister tried to indicate, they are going to give them training to cope with these situations. They are going to try to help them. It is not going to work. The people are overworked. They need more help. They need a break. They need some assistance in the legislation. They need some flexibility.

I can bring you cases, Mr. Speaker. If you want cases, I will give you cases, case after case after case, and you can settle it.

I am offering this to the minister: put your money where your mouth is. Help these people. Give some legislation. Give a break to the workers to help them. Do not sit there and try to convince us that they will be able to appeal, they will go through the system and they will qualify simply because they are trying to improve their lot in life and that will be covered under the UI bill. I am sorry, write it down. Put it in this legislation and then I

will believe it, when it is written down. Until then, no deal.

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot of talk in the House today about how the unemployed will have a process of appeal. We heard a minister in the government defending her government's insidious attack on women and on minorities by saying if you are sexually harassed, you can lay a complaint.

They can go through the process. They can add their names to the list of 191,000 people who have already appealed under the unemployment insurance changes passed by this government only three years ago. The reality is that employees who are sexually harassed on the job often do not dare to put their careers and their futures on the line by laying a complaint.

I have a very good friend who was sexually harassed on the job. She worked for a very large multinational company in a senior position and was sexually harassed on the job on a daily basis. She went to the president of the company to lay a complaint, having documented with human resources all of the elements of harassment: including four-letter words on a regular basis, bum patting, et cetera.

When she went through the process and went to the president of her company she was told point blank: "This man is a good worker for our company. He produces and I am sorry but there is nothing I can do". That woman is now working for a different company. Her boss, who sexually harassed her on a daily basis, is still working for that company.

People might ask: Why did she not go and lay a complaint, which she had every right to do? The reason she did not lay a complaint is the same reason that there are probably women employed by members of Parliament who do not always lay complaints. They fear for their careers and want to avoid being labelled as whiners and complainers.

[Translation]

An hon. member: That's true.

Ms. Copps: That is what we are up against. I do not know if any men here in the House have suffered sexual harassment, but I am sure that most of the women would be able to describe specific incidents. One thing is certain. It is easy to say go ahead, lay charges and go to court, but there is no guarantee, first of all, that they will believe you. Second, if you are trying to make a career for yourself, do you want to have a reputation as a complainer?

[English]

They want to be team players. They do not always want to be the ones coming forward with complaints.

The suggestion on the government side of the House that women are protected under this legislation is absolute nonsense.

[Translation]

There are many reasons why people may have to quit their jobs. Did any members here ever have to quit their job? My father became ill and never recovered. I left my job because I was working in a city far from home and my father was dying. Was that a good reason? Should I have gone to court and waited three, six or nine months or a year to explain that I wanted to be with my father at that painful time in his life?

Some hon. members: No problem, that will be taken care of.

Ms. Copps: Some members are saying: No problem, that will be taken care of. After Bill C-21 was passed, 200,000 Canadians filed complaints, and it has taken months and months to settle them.

It is interesting to listen to the speeches of Conservative members who admit they will fight this bill to the very end, and I am thinking of the hon. member for Jonquière.

An hon. member: Oh, he is a real sob sister.

Ms. Copps: He said it was like using a sledge hammer to crack a nut, the nut being the average citizen. When the hon. member for Saint-Léonard proposed this motion, it was intended to highlight suggestions made by Conservative members during the parliamentary recess.

• (1720)

The Conservative member for Beauce said that MPs should attack the conditions that create unemployment and not the unemployed. I agree. We must attack the causes and not the victims. The Conservative member for Abitibi again said that he would abstain. He can be for or against, but he should have the courage to take a

Supply

stand. Otherwise Mr. Speaker, he will remind me of a little dog that barks, but when the time comes, cannot bite. He is a little lapdog. The member is a little lapdog who cannot say either yes—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order, please. The hon. member for Terrebonne on a point of order.

Mr. Robitaille: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Hamilton East has just called my colleague a dog and a lapdog. You should consider that unparliamentary. I would ask you to ask the member to withdraw what she just said.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): On the same point of order, the hon. member for Saint-Denis.

Mr. Prud'homme: Mr. Speaker, we must not exaggerate. I was here. I listened closely to the hon. member. She did not say what the hon. member for Terrebonne just said. What she said may not be nice, but it is certainly not against the rules. She did not say that the hon. member was a dog. She has too much respect for all members. She said that he reminded her of a barking dog. That is not the same and it is certainly not unparliamentary. I admit that it may be embarrassing for the one who is the subject of the comparison, but it is not unparliamentary.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): On the same point of order, the hon. member for Abitibi.

Mr. Saint-Julien: Mr. Speaker, further to what the member said, I want to tell Canadians that I do not listen to criticism from people who have a bad attitude.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): On the same point of order, the hon. member for Richelieu.

Mr. Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, it is quite rare for me to fully agree with my colleague from Montreal who just spoke, but this time I fully agree, and no doubt—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I am sorry, the hon. member for Richelieu has too much parliamentary experience for me to take his remark, which is not a point of order.

*Supply**[English]*

Mr. Shields: Mr. Speaker, with great respect, we have all learned in this House to recognize that the member for Hamilton East does not live by the criticisms she makes of others.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Would the hon. member for Hamilton East have something to add?

Ms. Copps: Yes. I do not want to insult dogs. I take back everything that has to be taken back.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Ms. Copps: I think first of all that we absolutely must talk about it and deal with this issue. The reason I mentioned the comments of the members for Abitibi and Jonquière and others is that I was glad to see when Parliament was recessed that some Conservative members were going to join us in solidarity to fight this bill which is so unjust. Several of them—perhaps even a dozen—were going to vote against the government, but now that they have the opportunity here in the House, they do not have the courage to take a stand for or against. That is the important thing. The members for Abitibi and Jonquière cannot be professional crybabies. They must be here to do their duty for the unemployed.

[English]

The member says I am on my broom. When I read in the paper that members on the government side were coming to their senses and recognizing that this particular law penalizes women and the under-employed I was very happy to hear that at least six, eight, or possibly a dozen members of the Conservative Party might break ranks to join us in opposing this legislation.

An hon. member: Dream on.

Ms. Copps: The member says dream on. That is true, because one of the members who was the chief spokesperson of those in the Conservative Party seeking change has wilted before our very eyes.

He now tells us that he is not going to be for this amendment and he is not going to be against it, that he is going to abstain. I say to Conservative members that on this issue they either line up with the workers or ride with General Motors, to paraphrase a great Liberal who

understood Liberal principles. On this issue, I am happy that my party can absolutely and categorically disassociate itself from the comments and attitude of the minister of employment.

An hon. member: They cannot have it both ways.

Ms. Copps: The minister of employment said:

[Translation]

“Some people want to vacation in Florida and I do not want to pay them for that.” Another member, this one from Montreal, said right out that he had seen unemployed people from Quebec cash their UI cheque in Florida.

An hon. member: That’s impossible.

Ms. Copps: Well, if it is true, they should charge them under the Criminal Code. That is fraud. If they have evidence, they should declare it instead of politicking. In Montreal, they say openly and on the record that they are totally against this bill. Then they come back here but stay away when the time to vote comes.

[English]

What is really sad about this initiative is that when the government introduced its economic statement we were looking for a new economic direction. We know right now that Canada has the highest level of unemployment of the G-7 countries. We know that the number of chronic unemployed in this country, the long-term unemployed, has doubled to almost a million people, 806,000.

We also know that the number of part-time workers who would like to work full time and who want to work has increased from 400,000 to almost 700,000. Therefore, the issue is not about penalizing those people who may have to leave a job for good reason but about creating an economic climate in which people who want to work have the right to work.

When the Minister for International Trade commented in the House of Commons on the 10,000 people in my area who have lost their jobs as a direct result of his bad negotiations he did not attack the source. He did not attack the unfair complaint levelled by the United States. He blamed the Canadian workers. He blamed the Canadian workers who he characterized as being unproductive and behind the times.

The Steel Company of Canada, the largest steel company in Canada, happens to be one of the most productive companies in the whole area of steel manufacturing, no thanks to this government. It is a result of the hard work of ordinary people and the policies of the previous Liberal government, which paved the way for modernization.

It sickens me that when the Prime Minister is going to Washington this week, and he should be equipped with the facts to protect Canadian jobs, his own Minister for International Trade is undermining our position before the ITC and is undermining our international position in that area.

[Translation]

The hard part is that it reflects a mentality. The minister of employment characterizes the unemployed as people who want to spend all their time in front of the TV or go to Florida and do nothing. The Minister for International Trade blames the workers for his lack of judgment in the free trade negotiations. This evening, another minister said that women would have every recourse in the appeal process for cases involving sexual harassment. That is false.

All we want from the Conservative members tonight is that they face reality, namely that the failure of their economic policies has brought us to this situation. The unemployed cannot be blamed. We must blame those who are responsible.

• (1730)

I am happy, that the members of the Bloc Québécois, as well as the NDP, will be joining us this evening, especially because I am wondering if their leader protested when this government of which he was a minister introduced Bill C-21.

An hon. member: He did.

Ms. Copps: Did he speak against it?

An hon. member: Yes.

Ms. Copps: He did not do a thing at the time, because he was a minister in the government that introduced the first batch of bad changes to the unemployment insurance policy.

Bloc Québécois members were even there for the vote, as I recall: Mrs. Venne, Mr. Plamondon, Mr.

Leblanc, every one was there. They all voted in favour, and I am happy they have changed their policy. I hope that, with them and all the hon. members, we can all vote together. Let the whiners, if they are through whining, come and vote with us this evening to make sure that unemployed men and women cannot be blamed for our current economic situation.

Mr. Gilles Bernier (Beauce): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by pointing out that members opposite—regardless of their affiliation, opposition members—have put my name forward as the member for Beauce who has taken a stand against Bill C-105, dealing with certain measures regarding unemployment insurance.

I must tell members right away, to dispel any concern or fear, that tonight I intend to vote against the motion in amendment of the opposition. Allow me to tell you why, Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member for Richelieu could find it in him to be polite and listen, because for one thing the wording of the motion is completely wrong, and I will explain why.

That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance benefits to workers who quit their jobs—

They have failed to specify, as the legislation does, "who quit their jobs without just cause". That is not mentioned in the motion.

Second, they add:

—or who are dismissed is "too severe",—

They omitted "or dismissed for misconduct". That little phrase is extremely important. They go on to talk about a policy too tough for people, that puts people in a desperate situation and goes beyond fairness—

—is "extremist" and "right-wing" and is, therefore, unacceptable to the Canadian people.

This motion is not aimed at improving this bill. My position is quite simple.

Over the past week, the Conservative members who are dissenting on certain aspects of the bill, have managed—the hon. member for Hamilton East can tell me if we were right as far as that is concerned—to call a special party caucus, a special meeting with senior officials and to defer second reading of the bill in the House of Commons for a week. It was essential to allow members of Parliament to sit down with those who devised this bill and to help improve it.

Supply

My concerns and reservations about this bill are still here. This evening we will simply be voting on a motion specifically designed to overthrow the government.

I am not interested in overthrowing this government. I am interested in improving a bill. Therefore, I will vote against it with pleasure. I am perfectly comfortable with that. I mentioned it to the media, at home, this morning and again at lunch time, and the reaction was: "Well, Mr. Bernier, you are absolutely right. Let us give them a chance to improve their bill." Would the hon. member for Hamilton East not say so?

I will never vote for the Leader of the Opposition and his party. I know his track record too well for that.

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, this reminds me of those people who say: "Sure, I have strong principles, but if these do not suit you, I have others." What the hon. member said today runs directly counter to what he said on January 15, 1993, when he told—

An hon. member: Listen to this.

Ms. Copps: —the press: "Elected members of Parliament must strive to tackle the underlying causes of unemployment instead of attacking the unemployed." We must attack the cause, not the victim. Today he has an opportunity—

Mr. Saint-Julien: Not Liberals and bitches.

Ms. Copps: —to stop attacking the unemployed, but he will not take it. Why? Because he is a yes-man and a whiner and will not stand up for his principles. If I am wrong, he should at least support this motion which sends a clear message and repeats what was said by his own colleague, the hon. member for Jonquière, who now claims they do not make sense.

Those words were taken directly from a statement by the hon. member for Jonquière. If he has any trouble with reading or pronunciation, he should talk to his friend, the hon. member for Jonquière, who made all the statements reproduced today in the motion. It says clearly and distinctly that we are against this bill because this policy is "too severe" and "too tough", "puts people in a desperate situation", "goes beyond fairness", is "extremist" and "right wing" and is therefore unacceptable to the Canadian people.

[English]

If the member finds fault with the wording of the resolution he should find fault with his colleague, the

member for Jonquière, who actually spoke these very words only two weeks ago.

[Translation]

Mr. Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member for Abitibi use a term that was entirely uncalled for. He said: "Not Liberals and bitches", while looking at the hon. member who had the floor. I think such language is unacceptable, and the hon. member should withdraw.

Mr. Saint-Julien: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. You can check the blues. I have nothing to withdraw. When I referred to "chiennes", we can talk about a "chienne de travail", which is something you wear at work. A "chienne de travail" is a smock. The hon. member, however, is never in the House, so he does not know the meaning of the word "work".

Mr. Plamondon: Mr. Speaker, that is pretty far-fetched. What connection is there between a smock and this debate?

As far as my attendance is concerned, I have been here every time the House was sitting. I think my attendance compares favourably with his. In any case, the kind of language he used in referring to a great lady like the hon. member who was addressing the House is entirely unacceptable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): In any case, if these terms were used, they were part of an aside, and I did not hear them from my chair. We will check as soon as we have the blues.

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, as far as inappropriate language is concerned, I must say I deplore the terms used by the hon. member for Hamilton East, and I wanted to repeat what I said before. I know that in the past the hon. member for Hamilton East did not appreciate certain things that were said on this side of the House. I would have thought that subsequently she would have set a good example.

The hon. member for Hamilton East says we are doing nothing to fight unemployment. Is the hon. member aware that in 1983, her Liberal government spent \$225 million on manpower training? Ten years later, this government is spending more than \$3.5 billion on training. These are specific measures to fight unemployment which benefit the unemployed, so we are not just giving them an unemployment insurance cheque. The Liberals would rather keep people on unemployment insurance, give them cheques and keep them poor, because people are easier to exploit that way.

Supply

However, this government has decided to provide the programs and resources to help people who often have trouble entering the job market owing to a lack of training. We have allocated the necessary funding and resources to give them that chance. That is a concrete measure that was not mentioned by the hon. member for Hamilton East. That is all I have to say.

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, I remember that during my first year in the House, the first thing this government did was to cut the unemployment insurance program by 30 per cent. The last year the Liberals were in power, the unemployment insurance fund had \$1.3 billion, and the first thing the former finance minister did was to cut it down to \$700 million.

• (1740)

This works out to a 30 per cent cut, at a very difficult time for Canadian workers. Enough of these falsified figures. The fact is that 30 per cent of the cuts were already right there in the former minister's first budget in 1985.

Mr. Robitaille: Mr. Speaker, a point of order. The hon. member accused me of falsifying figures, but I want to make it clear that these are official figures and that I could table them at any time in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter L. McCreath (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of State (Finance and Privatization)): Mr. Speaker, I would normally be pleased to participate in a debate in this House but I am not so sure about what is going on here today.

When I hear the volatile language going back and forth, I cannot help but wonder if there are people across Canada who are unemployed today, what they think about what they have been listening to here. They would be pretty destitute to be still listening, given the level of discussion that we have been hearing.

I do not know what this motion is doing, taking up a day in the House. I cannot help but see this motion as nothing but a cynical exercise in mischief making by our friends on the other side. Reportedly the motion includes quotes from a member of this side of the House

who articulated some concerns with respect to proposed legislation. I would have thought it was the right and responsibility of that member.

The member raising the discussions has sat down with the minister responsible and discussed the proposed legislation which I would remind this Chamber has not even come before this House. That member of Parliament should be commended for speaking publicly and strongly about areas of concern that he has articulated. I am sure, when the legislation comes to this House, it will be very significantly improved because of the initiative of that member and other members in coming forward with their concerns.

What about this motion? How many people will this motion put back to work? Perhaps it is going to provide a day's employment for all the people here today, but that is not going to be of much benefit to Canadian taxpayers. There are a lot of serious issues which I would have thought an opposition that was genuinely concerned about this country might well have brought forward for debate today.

As I listen day after day in Question Period, those members are reaching in all directions, trying to convince Canadians that the country is falling down around us, notwithstanding the fact that this is probably the finest place in the world to live. Most of us are proud to be Canadians. Most people in Canada are anxious to find employment opportunities, if they do not have them. Most unemployed people are pleased to have the opportunities that are created through some of the measures of active unemployment insurance which this government has brought forward in the last few years, measures, I might say, that were opposed by my friends opposite.

I am sure members from every single riding are delighted to assist people in their communities to take advantage of section 25 programs, for example, which provide good work opportunities for unemployed people and the training and various other programs which have been made available through the Labour Force Development Strategy. They take full advantage of these programs in their ridings and then come here and scoff them.

Supply

The fact that the Liberal Party has brought forward this motion today is not only a manifestation of its mischief making but quite frankly, a manifestation of the bankruptcy of its own intellectualism and lack of substantive policies to bring forward to this House today.

We saw that when watching the Leader of the Opposition. I am looking forward over the next few months to seeing his policy pronouncements. He made one the other day that was a real winner. He told us that after two years today, he is going to scrap the GST. Then he told us that maybe he will not scrap the GST, maybe he will modify it. Then the next day, he will say, I guess the GST has got to stay. Now we have the definitive announcement that the GST is going.

Stay tuned, folks. One of these days, if he gets to be Prime Minister—that is a fantasy idea if ever there was one—he will tell us in his first budget where he is going to get the \$15 billion, \$16 billion, \$17 billion worth of revenue that the GST is providing. Stay tuned, folks, we can have only one idea a year. That is it for now. Scrap the GST. It will take him another year to come up with an idea of what on earth we are going to do to replace it.

If we believe what we read in the news, what he is going to replace it with is a hidden tax on food. That is kind of a neat idea. It will go over really well, I am sure, with people from coast to coast. If my friends opposite were seriously interested—

Mr. Wappel: You're being a hypocrite, Peter.

An hon. member: They are scared, Peter.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. McCreath: Mr. Speaker, I thought I had the floor and I say to my hon. friends: withdraw.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Order, please. I ask the hon. member for Scarborough West to show more restraint. I heard the word hypocrite and I believe this expression to be unparliamentary.

Does the hon. member for Scarborough West wish to add anything else?

[English]

Mr. Wappel: If your ruling, Mr. Speaker, is that that is an unparliamentary term, then I of course withdraw it. I will let the people of Canada decide when they go to

McDonald's and pay GST on their food to reflect on the comments of the hon. member.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I appreciate the hon. member's reaction.

I now recognize the hon. member for South Shore.

[English]

Mr. McCreath: Mr. Speaker, I was not at all offended by my friend's little bit of enthusiasm. I was digging a little bit too close to home with my comments. That might have been the problem.

In any event, to get back to the subject, since we have the subject of unemployment insurance before the House today, we might as well try to talk a little bit seriously about it. My friends opposite have made a great deal of noise about the whole business of voluntary quitters, for example, and sexual harassment.

I have not seen exactly how many cases have been brought in the area of sexual harassment. I understand it is a very limited number. What is important when we look at this issue is that we remember that what is exempted from that is the concept of just cause.

I believe the Minister of State in her remarks made reference to this question. Having sat many months on the committee on Bill C-21 and travelled coast to coast to hear a lot of people come before that committee and express their concerns with respect to the need for a definition of just cause, the committee, and I might say to give credit where credit is due on the initiative of the member for Ottawa West, brought forth an amendment. When that amendment which provided for that definition came before this House, what did my friends opposite do? They voted against it.

Earlier I heard the member for Hamilton East talk about members over here abstaining. She said, and I quote her directly: "You have either got to line up with the workers or with General Motors". When it came before this House to define this concept, where was she? She abstained or at least she did not vote for it. She did not vote against it. I have it here, the amendment and the definition. I guess she did not line up either with the workers or with General Motors on that particular occasion. It will be interesting to see when the legislation comes forth again where she lines up.

Why are changes needed? What is unemployment insurance? What has unemployment insurance become in this country? Originally the idea was to provide assistance to people should they lose their unemployment unexpectedly to tide them over financially until such time as they could find a new job. It is insurance in the unanticipated event of unemployment. In fact, unemployment insurance in Canada has gone away beyond that.

I remember some years ago when I was active in the teaching profession in the early seventies when changes were brought forward that allowed leave from your employment for a maternity benefit. It was something that was very much welcomed by the teaching profession which at that time was about 52 per cent women. It was a welcome benefit.

It really went against the concept of unemployment because the minute we start paying unemployment insurance to somebody who is on a leave of absence from their job, we have gone long beyond the concept of insurance against unemployment. There are a number of other circumstances for which unemployment insurance is paid to people. I guess we have to admit that what has happened in our society is that we have taken what was supposed to be an insurance scheme and really turned it into an income security scheme.

• (1750)

There are large sections of the country, like the one from which I come in Atlantic Canada, where in fact people who are employed part time for part of the year manage to sustain themselves and have their income supported in part by unemployment insurance throughout other parts of the year. This, of course, is true in the fishing industry where people cannot fish all year round, by decree of the government. That is how unemployment insurance got into the fishery in the first place. The government which ran the fishery closed it from time to time. Then, to make up for the fact that it was the government that would not let people work, it allowed them to draw unemployment insurance.

Now we have a whole scheme of unemployment insurance in the fishing industry. There are problems with that. I have had a number of people who know that I

Supply

represent a constituency with a substantial number of people in the fishing industry say to me: Well, fishermen can go out and make a lot of money for a part of the year and then still be eligible to draw unemployment insurance, and that is not right. Certainly if a person makes a lot of money it is questionable whether they should be drawing unemployment insurance.

I think the point should be made in this House that there are an awful lot of fishermen in Nova Scotia who are eligible but do not draw unemployment insurance because they say their income is at a level where they should not. There are an awful lot of fishermen and plant workers who are seasonally employed who need that unemployment insurance in order to get by.

That is the way the thing has become. If we are going to have a scheme like this, should it be one that provides incentives or should it be one that provides disincentives? This is an issue that is often raised. I frequently have been approached by Christmas tree growers in my constituency who say they cannot get anybody to work, that they would rather sit home and draw unemployment insurance. That may be true or that may not be true, I cannot comment on that because I do not know. I do know that they would not come to my office if they were able to find people willing to work. Yet there are people in the same area who are in fact on unemployment insurance. Clearly there are problems with the system. It needs to be improved.

One of the improvements that this government made which I think is extremely important was the gradual shift of the concept from strictly a passive unemployment insurance system to an active one; the notion that somebody who was unemployed should just sit home until such time as they get a job. They visit the employment agency looking for work, but in the meantime they do not have an opportunity to improve their skills or develop further experience that will assist them to relocate themselves within the employment system. That lateral approach to me is a good one. That was the concept behind Bill C-21. Today we hear people talk, sometimes even from the other side of this House, about the need for adjustment programs as we as a country come to grips with the structural changes that are taking place in the world.

Supply

Some parties in this House do not want to acknowledge those changes, but the fact is they are there. This government has tried to move Canada toward the 21st century. That is why we have had the initiatives in the area of trade that are so debunked across the aisle. That is why we have restructured the Canadian tax system to improve the productivity and the competitiveness of Canadian industry.

Another element of that is providing support for employment adjustment for the people who, as my friends like to tell us on a daily basis, have had their employment disrupted or indeed lost because of the changes in international competition in marketing and selling in business and so forth. This move toward active unemployment, providing opportunities for people to prepare themselves for opportunities that will exist in the future, is the direction in which we need to go. We think this approach of constantly opposing, opposing, opposing is a sort of head in the sand approach that does not make any more sense than the approach they have taken with respect to coming to grips with world trade and with the need to move our economy in a more competitive direction.

That is the reality of the situation. The approach that this government has taken with respect to unemployment insurance is quite consistent with this concept of trying to make the system work to assist and support Canadians to prepare them for the 21st century.

The reality is that we have been through a real tough recession. A recession means that everybody has less money to work with and the government is right in there with everybody else. Government revenues are down and unemployment rises during a recession. That is a reality of the situation, not a pleasant reality but it is a reality. More people unemployed means more draw on the unemployment insurance system.

What the Minister of Finance was faced with a couple of months ago when he brought in his economic statement was how we would pay for that. I know our friends opposite oppose every cost-cutting measure made by the government. They come up with a thousand ways the government should spend more money but they are a little bit short when it comes to ideas as to where the government gets the money to spend.

We know what the current Leader of the Opposition did when he was President of the Treasury Board. He did

not worry about it. In the two years he held that office he managed to hold rising government spending to a mere 29 per cent, a record of which he was quite proud. I may have to check my math but I do not think government expenditures have grown 29 per cent since this government has been in power. The average growth is about 4 per cent. My math may be a little off but actually I think that is pretty darn close.

We know that the solution of the Leader of the Opposition to these problems is to not worry about it. Just like scrapping the GST. I love that one. Scrap the GST and some time in the future we will figure out where to get the money. That is not the approach this government takes.

This government's approach is if expenditures go up such as the draw on unemployment insurance, we deal with it either by holding the line on expenditures or by increasing the premiums. That is what insurance companies do, is it not? This is supposed to be an insurance scheme, though as I said earlier it has also become an income support scheme.

One of the things this government felt would stimulate small business and would help the regeneration of our economy coming out of this recession is of course to try to make more money available to the business community by holding the line on UI premiums. That meant there had to be some cost-cutting measures.

I received a letter today from a gentleman by the name of Ron Burgess of Rose Bay, Nova Scotia. I have never met Mr. Burgess but he writes me frequently. I have to say in fairness and honesty to him he is usually pretty critical of me and the government and that is his right as a citizen. I always write him back because he usually has a good point and I try to present our point of view.

In his letter he was scorching me pretty good because he said we were cutting back the unemployed with this proposal to reduce the percentage from 60 per cent to 50 per cent. What Mr. Burgess does not understand and what a lot of people across Canada do not understand is that the amount of money to be received by the unemployed is not being reduced at all because the contribution ceiling is going up and the percentage drops a little bit. The net result is that the recipient gets the same amount of money.

Supply

That is called a freeze and the government has imposed a freeze on wages and salaries in the Public Service of Canada, on members of Parliament and indeed on the Prime Minister.

I was accused of nasty things by my colleague opposite. The fact of the matter is it is kind of bizarre when the people receiving payments from the Government of Canada but are not working get an increase and the wages of those working for the Government of Canada are frozen. Now is there or is there not a freeze?

Mr. Harvard: What is the difference in pay?

Mr. McCreath: My hon. friend from Winnipeg—St. James asks as to what is the difference in pay. Well obviously there is a substantial difference in pay. One understands and recognizes that. That is why the ceiling on UI grows on an annual basis.

I think it is important that we try to convey to the public the truth of what is going on and not try to mislead or distort the reality of the situation. When we talk about moving from 60 per cent to 57 per cent it is important at the same time to point out the rise in the ceiling so that people will understand what is actually taking place with respect to this situation.

The issue of fairness comes up and we hear a lot of talk about fairness. Is this fair? The proposed changes I would suggest are fair. They are fair in that they represent but one element of the minister's measures to restrain the deficit and finance new initiatives. They are fair in that they help to free up money for activities such as training and development for unemployed workers. They are fair to employers who will be able to hire new workers thanks to the UI premium holiday for small business. They are fair to premium payers who cannot be expected, particularly in these tough times, to support people who choose not to work. They are fair as well to future UI premium payers who without these changes would have confronted an extra \$1 billion of UI deficit, a deficit which can only be paid up in the final analysis with their premiums. I would suggest that there is quite an element of fairness.

I would like to say a few words on the issue of voluntary quitters about which there has been so much discussion. There have been a lot of misconceptions sent across the land about this issue—is that all the time I have? What a shame, I am doing so well.

• (1800)

I want to reiterate what many of my colleagues have said. Voluntary quitters who quit with just cause will not be penalized by these proposed measures. Any suggestions to the contrary are mischief making. When my hon. friend from Scarborough West accuses me of hypocrisy I would suggest that one take a look in the mirror. If anybody is suggesting that people who quit with just cause will be imperilled by this legislative proposal they are wrong. The reasons are spelt out in the act. The Liberal Party voted against them. There have been a multitude of decisions by the Supreme Court of Canada and the Federal Court listing reasons. There are 50 pages of valid reasons, of just cause spelt out and binding.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): We now move to questions and comments for 10 minutes. First I will recognize the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie and then the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I want to raise three points briefly so that my colleague can make more elaborate comments on Bill C-105.

First, it seems that work relations are somewhat ignored in this legislation, and this is evidenced in a letter sent by the bar to the Minister of Finance which says: "The outright denial of the right to benefits in all cases where workers voluntarily quit their job without just cause in the legal sense or in cases of misconduct would show a lack of realism regarding the conflictual situations that occur in the context of work relations." This is what the Quebec bar had to say.

Second, I want to submit the case of a CIP worker in Trois-Rivières, for example, who, after working and contributing to the UI program for 25 years, loses his job because the plant closes down. This worker does not want to be unemployed, he knows he must find a job. He does find a job by chance—I mean by chance—and works for three or four days before quitting because the work conditions are really not suitable for him. He then goes to the unemployment insurance office where he is told: "You quit your job, therefore you are not entitled to benefits." Do you not think that because of situations like this people will say: "I am not taking any chances; I would rather be getting UI benefits than make an effort to find a job and risk losing it all"?

Supply

My last point is this. It seems to me this bill is an example of two types of justice. Here is why. People accused of misconduct or of leaving without just cause are automatically denied any benefits. Therefore, these people are sentenced before being judged. They will have to appeal the decision and it will take weeks if not months before they are told that they were right or wrong. The sentence is imposed before a judgment is rendered.

Under the Criminal Code or the civil code, a person is not sentenced before judgment. For example, there are a number of Conservative members accused or convicted of fraud who still get their full salary and enjoy all their privileges because a judgment has yet to be rendered or because they have appealed the verdict.

Is the member not a little uncomfortable since, on the one hand, he wants to arbitrarily cut off thousands of workers, while on the other hand he is sitting here in this House next to people who have been accused and convicted of fraud and who still receive their full salary? Is this not an example of two kinds of justice, one for the rich and one for the poor?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I ask the hon. members to be cautious when they refer to events or issues which are still before the courts. Again I recognize the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Mr. Duceppe: Mr. Speaker, I want to point out that I did not mention any names. Those are established facts and I did not presume that these people were innocent or guilty. Consequently, in no way have I violated the *sub judice* rule. Absolutely not.

Therefore, I believe my comments were pertinent because they refer to facts.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I take note of the comment made by the hon. member but the Chair does not want to take any chance and is simply advising members to be careful in this respect.

Mr. Robitaille: Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out to the Chair that my colleague did suggest that some members

had been convicted of fraud and were still sitting in this House. This is absolutely not true.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I do not want this issue to drag on. I believe what I said earlier puts an end to this discussion. I simply want to say that it is a matter of being cautious and, as far as the Chair is concerned, the comment made by the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie ended the debate.

[English]

Mr. McCreath: Mr. Speaker, I think I understood the intent of the hon member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie in that he was trying to illustrate his argument.

I noticed his reference to Bill 105, which in my understanding is not what is before the House. I too picked up his reference to purported allegations against members of this House and in particular, the reference he made to members of this party.

Some would suggest that there are many kinds of impropriety, one being to run for public office under the banner of a political party that stands for a strong united Canada, then walk away from that party, draw a cheque and represent a party that seeks to destroy and take apart this country. Some would suggest that is a fraudulent activity. I will not say that because I would not want to transgress the rules of this House.

I want to deal with the issue that my hon. friend raised. I think all members of this House are concerned about the fact that just cause is a meaningless concept if, when individuals leave for what they believe to be just cause, in fact end up not receiving the benefit to which they are entitled.

As I indicated earlier, my colleague from Ottawa West of the Liberal Party brought forward an amendment to Bill C-21. It was a good amendment in my judgment and I supported it, unlike her colleagues. It set out a series of categories. Since that time, we have had an abundance of decisions, 50 pages of decisions. I would be glad to make a copy of this available to my hon. friend who is raising what are legitimate concerns from his perspective.

These are binding definitions provided by the court. There are 50-odd different ones covering a tremendous variety of topics, which I would be glad to delineate for the record. Members may as well avail themselves of a copy because it is very interesting. The important thing is that we recognize what is here. If the system does not work, then we challenge it.

If people leave their jobs for a legitimate reason, then they should be supported. If they do not get satisfaction from their CEIC office, I would hope, if nothing else, they would go to see their member of Parliament and complain. Part of the function of a member of Parliament is to see that individuals get fair treatment from the system. That is what we are here about, however let us not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

I want to tell members that I have many constituents on the south coast of Nova Scotia who think that people who decide that they want to quit their jobs to go home and do something else, or as the minister suggested, go somewhere else, it is not on. It is not what the system is for. The system is to protect people who lose their jobs who do not want to lose their jobs. It is the voluntary quitter that is key. Just cause is a different ballgame altogether, and let us not forget it.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a very short comment and pose a few questions.

When 19,000 of 191,000 UI applicants who were initially held to have quit their jobs without just cause subsequently were found to have just cause, could we accept a 10 per cent error in the magnitude of error in judgment? Could we? Is it fair?

Second, I ask the hon. member if it is fair that years of prior contribution by the employee will go down the drain under the clause without just cause. Is it fair? Is it fair that the burden of proof will be on the workers who cannot avail themselves of representatives and perhaps lawyers to argue their cases before a quasi-judicial tribunal. Is it fair?

Is it fair that the balance of power will be tilted to favour the employers and to the detriment of the employees? I ask: Does this member know how much it would cost to administer this particular change in the UI act?

Supply

Mr. McCreath: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how much time I have to respond but I will certainly do my best.

With respect to the first point, and I am not sure exactly what he is talking about, but if the appeal process turned around 19,000 of them, then one must conclude that maybe the appeal process works. Maybe some others might conclude something else.

• (1810)

As for the business of prior contribution, every year I pay a considerable amount of money buying myself auto insurance. My wife thinks that with the way I drive it is a darn good investment.

I hope to never collect a nickel of it. I hope I never have to collect my life insurance either. The bottom line is that we pay into insurance schemes with the hope that we will never collect a claim from them. The system must be a fair one. My hon. friend from Winnipeg North may find that his constituents totally disagree and they think that anyone who wants to quit his or her job should be able to draw unemployment insurance to the end. That is fine if that is what his constituents think. It is not what mine think.

My constituents think that people who quit their jobs voluntarily should not be eligible for unemployment insurance. That is what my constituents think. As for the question of prior contributions, it is similar to any other insurance premiums. I pay and I think most people pay hoping not to collect.

I want to comment on his allegation that the balance of power is with the employer. That is a tough concept to deal with. How do I know that is true? How do I know that is not true? I do not. My hon. friends would have it so that people would walk into the office and say: "My boss sexually harassed me and he or she is guilty". There would be implied guilt to the employer with no opportunity to respond. It would be automatic. If someone walks in and says it is sexual harassment or any of the litany of other reasons it is supposed to be taken on faith. Nobody would ever scam the unemployment insurance system, would they? Everybody who goes in tells the absolute unequivocal truth. Why should there be a process to hear the other side of the story?

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.

Supply

If he is turned down at the CEC, he has to go to the board of referees. The average delay is about two to three months if you go through the entire process.

Mr. Della Noce: No, no.

Mr. Allmand: The hon. member will have a chance to make his speech. I checked with the government officials today and these are the figures from your government. I checked this afternoon. The average delay is two to three months.

Mr. Della Noce: You listen to my speech. You may learn something.

Mr. Allmand: I have not learned very much from you and you have been here nearly eight years.

There have always been penalties. I want to make clear that we believe in a reasonable penalty. We accepted the penalty of one to six weeks which we thought was reasonable. In 1990 when the government brought in the seven to twelve week period it was getting a bit more excessive. We opposed that. To completely deny benefits to people who have paid premiums is harsh and unacceptable, especially if it is not easy to prove and it is not clear-cut both on the firing side and on the quitting side.

What is going to happen to these people? They have to live. We do not live in a country where we let people starve to death. This government, and it has done it before, is shifting the burden to the provinces and the municipalities. These people will have to go on welfare. The government is doing that all the time, shifting the burden down. In Ontario and Nova Scotia the municipalities will have to pick up the bill to pay for these people who need to support their children and so on.

By the way, the figures show that with the quitters, the people who quit, who believe they have just cause or not, get jobs in a very reasonable period of time when conditions are good for employment. When conditions are bad such as during the last year when we were in a deep recession and unemployment is over 10 per cent people just do not quit their jobs. I have them in my office all the time looking for work.

• (1820)

There may be examples of people who goof off and abuse the system, but there are many more people who

want to work. They come to our offices all the time asking us if we can help them find jobs. They do not frivolously leave their jobs. Most people do not do absolutely ridiculous things which will have them fired for cause, for reason of misbehaviour.

I described the process in the law. It came about as a result of an amendment from this side of the House, because I was the critic at the time. When the penalty was increased from seven to twelve weeks, we asked the government to at least put in a definition of just cause and it did. It put in certain things. It was not entirely what we wanted, but at least it was a step in the right direction. Now there are five reasons set out in the law.

That is good, but it is still hard to prove and the burden of proof is still on the unemployed person. In many cases it is very difficult to prove and to go to this excessive penalty is not acceptable.

Mr. Speaker, my time is nearly up, but let me say that these measures by this Conservative government are just another step in the gradual destruction of the unemployment insurance system.

We said during the free trade debate there would be a lot of pressure on Canada to harmonize social programs with those in the United States. Everybody knows that many states in the United States do not have any unemployment insurance. In some they have very low unemployment insurance. At the request of business this government has been trying to push down our social benefits, including our unemployment insurance system to make it similar to those in the United States.

In this bill the government is acting unilaterally in changing the program. In 1990 it did away with its contribution to the fund. Until 1990 the unemployment insurance fund had three contributors: the workers of the country, the employers of the country and the government which contributed 20 per cent. In 1989 the government had contributed \$2.8 billion to the fund. It cut that out entirely. Now the fund is solely contributed to by the workers and the employers. They should have some control over the fund. They did not have any say whatsoever in the changes we are discussing today. The government did not discuss them with the workers and the unions. It did not discuss them with the employer association.

Supply

This is another example of this government totally disregarding the rightful interests in certain programs and policies in this country.

In my final remarks, let me say this. Unemployment insurance is good for the workers. In times of unemployment it sees them through. It helps them pay for their food, their rent and their basic necessities during hard times when they are not working. It also helps business because it keeps money in circulation. It reduces the number of bankruptcies. It means that people are spending money, money they get from unemployment insurance for the basic things of life.

It is not like the Great Depression of the thirties when there was no unemployment insurance, but that is the direction in which this government is going.

[Translation]

Mr. André Harvey (Chicoutimi): Mr. Speaker, I was in the habit of listening respectfully to the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce when he spoke, in view of his long experience, but I can only deplore hearing him make comments such as those we heard a moment ago. It is absolutely unbelievable to claim that the federal government is passing its responsibilities for social assistance on to the provincial and municipal governments.

An hon. member: Demagogy at work.

Mr. Harvey (Chicoutimi): When you think that Gérard Larose used to say that our government should be criticized for being antisocial. The numbers speak for themselves: since 1984, this government has increased its social commitments by 50 per cent. These are the exact figures, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce will know there is between \$44 billion and \$66 billion to help the provinces meet their commitments for education, health, welfare, and so on.

Someone also stated this afternoon on behalf of the leader of the Bloc Québécois that he was very sorry for the poor. To this gentleman who has a sporadic, intermittent concern for the poor, I might offer this piece of advice: do not live 500 kilometres away from your riding; visit your riding regularly, weekly, to address the issues affecting your riding; look after your municipalities.

It is our duty. These people having voted for our party, I feel under the moral obligation to do a good job at

representing them in government, because the leader of the Bloc Québécois is illegitimate.

I have also heard folks from the FTQ say that we should go after the companies. You may be assured, Mr. Speaker, that since our government came to power, 50 000 companies are paying their taxes regularly. We have brought the rate down from 2.7 per cent to 0.7 per cent, and this 0.7 per cent is made up of small businesses with 5, 10 or 15 employees who have had the misfortune of having deficits and which are amortizing them over a few years.

Let me tell you something, Mr. Speaker. Without trying to outdo the Official Opposition in wild statements, I can tell you some people will vote against Bill C-105 because of the freeze on their salaries. They will not admit it, because the bill does contain some very progressive measures. Let me tell you something else. The FTQ says that an area like ours will lose \$60 million, but they left out a couple of things. They failed to mention that \$4 billion, 20 per cent of the total amount, as taken from the unemployment insurance fund to also be invested in areas like ours. They also failed to mention that the contributions of many small businesses have been frozen, and that they will get tax credits when they hire new employees—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. The length of speeches being limited to five minutes, I must, in all fairness, give the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce the opportunity to respond.

[English]

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, no wonder the government is at 18 per cent in the polls when you get the kind of statement we just heard from the hon. member. No wonder the government's credibility is almost zero in this country.

Who is the member trying to fool when he suggests to this House and to the Canadian people that the government has increased transfer payments to the provinces? There is no doubt in our minds that the decrease in transfer payments to the provinces is in the millions of dollars.

[Translation]

Mr. Harvey (Chicoutimi): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for Chicoutimi on a point of order.

Mr. Harvey (Chicoutimi): I am sorry, but I think that we are operating under a highly advanced system of ministerial responsibility and, to be as popular as the hon. member, all we would have to do would be to increase government spending by 15 per cent year after year, and the debt would rise to \$850 billion in no time—

Mr. Prud'homme: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for Saint-Denis on a point of order.

Mr. Prud'homme: I simply want to submit to the Chair that a point of order should indeed be one. The arguments being put forward may be interesting and make for a fascinating speech, yet they do not constitute a point of order. It is the continuation of a speech. I would ask that my colleague be allowed to continue—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I thank the hon. member for Saint-Denis, but the Chair had already realized that it was a matter of opinion. I shall give the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce one more minute.

[English]

Mr. Allmand: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, the statements made by the hon. member are totally false.

As a result of Bill C-21 in 1990, unemployment insurance coverage for Canadian workers was reduced from 70 per cent to 58 per cent. What happened to those workers who were not covered? They had to get welfare from the municipalities and the provinces of Canada. Welfare bills went up, and that is a fact. Ask any province. The government cut transfer payments for education, it cut transfer payments for health care and it cut transfer payments for social services. It is a farce. Nobody believes it anymore.

Mr. Robert D. Nault (Kenora—Rainy River): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to enter this debate.

Supply

I would like to start by reading the opposition motion which I think is very significant and should not be taken very lightly. The motion reads:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance benefits to workers who quit their jobs or who are dismissed is "too severe", "too tough for people", "puts people in a desperate situation", "goes beyond fairness", is "extremist" and "right-wing"—

Those are very damning statements to make about any particular government. I want to put this debate into context for a moment. It seems the debate we are having today is one dealing with quitters. Because we are entering into that debate it is necessary for us first to put into perspective how many people we are really talking about.

• (1830)

In 1992 the total of claims delayed or denied was 132,800. Out of that total 2,740 people were fired for misconduct and 16,710 quit their jobs. For the sake of this whole debate we are talking about 20,000 people.

One of the interesting parts of this whole debate is that out of the 20,000 people we are talking about 50 per cent of them quit their jobs because they were on their way to another job. As the mathematician that you are, it means that 10,000 people are removed from this debate. Of the remaining 10,000 people 43 per cent found a new job within 10 weeks. Therefore the whole amount we are debating today is 6 per cent to 7 per cent, in essence roughly 2,000 people.

If we are talking about 2,000 people in the whole system who are legitimately going to have to go through the process of dealing with just cause, we should put it into perspective. The reasons for these people quitting their jobs should be looked at. There are some very good reasons.

Let me give a good reason. The minister opposite who spoke not too long ago said simply that we were prepared to look at sexual harassment and the proof of sexual harassment. I checked this afternoon and last year in the city of Thunder Bay alone 10 cases of sexual harassment were reported to the UIC office. The fact remains that if a small town like Thunder Bay had 10 reported cases, one can suggest that across the board the number must be a lot higher. If we are only talking about 2,000 people in this whole process then I must question just what it is that the government has in mind.

Supply

If the government is serious about dealing with people who should not be on unemployment insurance for legitimate reasons then we should not be talking about the quitters. That is because statistics and our own people whom we hire for their professional abilities are saying that the amount of dollars saved by bringing in legislation to not give unemployment insurance to quitters is almost nil.

There is another interesting statistic and the government will confirm it. We lose roughly \$200 million a year by people classified as cheaters. Obviously that is what seems to be the problem with the system and why certain members of Parliament are quick to jump to their feet and say: "Well, I know somebody who went to Florida and was on UI", or "I know someone who has a night job or is working on the side and is collecting UI". They of course are a different kettle of fish. That is the debate we should be having here today and not this one about quitters.

If you believe in fairness and if you believe that people as human beings are decent and care about society, themselves and their families certainly they are not going to quit for no reason.

Therefore this motion is something we should be very conscious of simply because of the roughly 2,000 people who are classified as quitters are quitting for very legitimate reasons. Now we are asking as parliamentarians through legislation which is going to be brought forward in the next weeks that the onus be on those people, that they are in essence guilty until proven innocent. Those 2,000 people we are talking about in this scenario are those being sexually harassed and are afraid in an unsafe work place.

It is important for members across the way to know another statistic. These are the latest figures from Statistics Canada. In 1990 for fatal occupational injuries there were 809 deaths. There were 592,824 non-fatal occupational injuries resulting in lost time and 438,449 non-fatal occupational injuries with no lost time.

One might ask what that has to do with this debate. The fact remains that there are a lot of people getting hurt and a lot of people dying on the job in this country. Now, for someone to go to a higher authority and suggest that there are unsafe working conditions, they are at risk of losing their job. If they are at risk of losing their job without some sort of ability to find another social safety net while they go through this process, they will be more

reluctant to talk about the unsafe conditions in the work place.

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, without blinking an eye that I believe with legislation like this we are going to see fatal occupational injuries in our country rise. Men and women need to survive. They need to pay for their children's education and put food on the table. They will, as they did in the past, allow for certain occupational risks in order to make a living. I am concerned that for roughly 2,000 people we are putting Canadians in these situations of risk.

We are one of the G-7 countries foolish enough to make these changes. Germany does not do it with quitters. Italy does not do it with quitters. Japan does not do it with quitters. The only countries I can find in the G-7 that deal with quitters the way we are proposing are France, and Heaven knows why, and some of the United States.

Let us go back to what I think this government is really doing. This is a very empty gesture of saving money by penalizing quitters and not letting them collect UI. As I said before 93 per cent or 94 per cent of them get a job right away or within 10 weeks. We are really talking about a very small number of people in desperate situations. That is the reason they quit in the first place.

If that is the case then really what the government is doing through the back door is creating a smoke-screen, why I do not know. It is reducing the amount of unemployment insurance people are allowed to collect from 60 per cent to 57 per cent which is going to save \$2.5 billion. Of course we are so busy debating about quitters, about 2,000 people, that we are not talking about the roughly \$90 a month this government is prepared to take out of somebody's unemployment cheque which is so small already that the day to day costs of living cannot be met.

If this is the best this government can do to improve its position in the polls, I think the party on this side of the House really does not have anything to worry about. People really see through this when they look at the numbers and realize that these changes do nothing for us as a country except pit worker against employer. It makes Canadians feel that they cannot be trusted, that there are bunch of quitters out there who really do not care about Canada. That is a misconception all Canadians are going to see through once they have an opportunity to look at the numbers as I have tried to state them today in the short period of time I had.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): The hon. member for Laval-Est, on a question of privilege.

Mr. Della Noce: Mr. Speaker, if you will allow me, I heard the hon. member say, and if I am mistaken, my colleague can correct me.

[English]

When he talked about voluntary quitters, he said 4,000. My numbers are that in 1991 there were 225,000 and 80 per cent did not have a cause for leaving.

• (1840)

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but this kind of mutual correcting is not, strictly speaking, a point of order but a matter of opinion or debate. The Chair cannot accept this as a point of order.

Mr. Phillip Edmonston (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. member's comments. I think he deserves to be commended for his even temper and the fact that he insulted no one. Furthermore, I thought he quoted some very interesting statistics.

We cannot deny the fact, unfortunately, that there are people who abuse the unemployment insurance system. It is a fact, and I think if I were convinced it was a serious and urgent problem, I would have no hesitation in voting with the government. But that is not the case. Actually, I was glad to hear some statistics, because they confirmed more or less what I read a few days ago in *Le Devoir*. This newspaper concluded that abusers of the system represented only 1 per cent of claimants. I was delighted to hear the statistics quoted by the hon. member.

One of the questions I would like to ask him is this: Instead of penalizing everyone, should the government not have put the emphasis on manpower training? Instead of paying people to do nothing, to stay home, because I assume Canadians would rather work, why not

Supply

put the emphasis on manpower training as they do in other countries, especially in Scandinavian countries where I believe more than two-thirds of the amount is allocated to manpower training? Would he agree this would be a better way for the government to invest its money?

If the answer is yes, how does he reconcile that with statements by his leader to the effect that we need to increase centralization?

[English]

Mr. Nault: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my colleague. First of all, I emphasize that this legislation in essence removes \$2.5 billion out of the system, out of the hands of Canadians who of course spend that money. When we talk about unemployment insurance, I am sure not a portion of it goes into savings accounts. It goes right back into the economy.

With the talk about coming out of the recession and looking to stimulate the economy, this government has done something quite interesting. It has removed \$2.5 billion out of people's pockets. Even though they are unemployed, they still spend that money.

It is difficult for me to understand why the government is doing what it is doing. Looking at the numbers, to me it is a smoke-screen to deal with the bigger issue. That is, this government lacks policy to deal with the unemployed.

There are a large number of unemployed Canadians. What should be asked and what we should be debating tonight are our suggestions as members of Parliament to get that large population of Canadians, 1.6 million who are unemployed, back to work. I would love to have that emergency debate, which is what we need in this country.

Instead we are pushed by this agenda of the government that there are so many cheaters, quitters and people who have to be pounded down to the ground by the government because they cannot be trusted. As opposition we fall into the trap of going with the agenda of the government.

Supply

We are spending our time talking about roughly 2,000 people who really are in desperate need of UI because they quit for sexual harassment reasons, they quit because they felt it was unsafe in the work place or they had tensions and pressures on them that are hard to explain to UI or a referee board or anything like that. Instead, we should be talking about how to create employment. I say to the member that I look forward to the day when we can have discussions in this House with more than a few members of the government sitting listening to us so that we can discuss in legitimate terms just how we can make this country a little better for all of us.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Resuming debate. I give the floor to the hon. member for Laval-Est and ask that he indicate to the Chair whether he wants to use all his time or share it with a colleague.

Mr. Vincent Della Noce (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State and to Minister of Multiculturalism and Citizenship): Mr. Speaker, I will share my time with the hon. member for Abitibi and I will take my 10 minutes. I thank the assistant whip who also gave me his speaking time.

First of all, I would like to say at the beginning that these things interest me and I want to talk about them. Unfortunately, we only have 10 minutes. I want to get to the point right away. As you know, almost all members' offices were invaded today by unions and groups that naturally came into our offices without appointments, without calling, by surprise. I find it very unfortunate that union members paid by the union, as was confirmed, who are not unemployed did that to the detriment of many colleagues and employees.

Nevertheless, I must point out that in my office, there were wonderful, polite, nice people who were surprisingly courteous with my staff. Still, they have taken over our riding offices and are deciding themselves when they will arrive and how long they will stay. I find that really deplorable.

The worst part is that at the offices of some of our colleagues here on this side of the House, there were violence and arrests, believe it or not. I find that even more deplorable. That was in Ahuntsic, to help you get an idea. I have just spoken with the police and I received confirmation that there were violence and arrests. I find

that too bad because those people to whom I myself spoke today told my assistants that they left more enlightened than when they came in.

Perhaps some of my colleagues have not had a chance to talk or explain, since we were meeting in caucus this morning. We discussed all the points for two hours and we are finding the best possible solutions for our workers. We must not forget that the government has a big problem. This is also a question of dollars and cents.

I must tell you that now that we are at this point, there have even been threats against our homes and families. I called and asked the RCMP, who seemed unaware of certain things, to do their job. I must tell you that if there is no protection tomorrow, probably I will not be able to come to sit here. This is a notice to those concerned! When our families are affected because of a bill, we realize that members are no longer free to act in the House of Commons. Groups are now dictating to the government what to do. That is too bad. I am ready to meet those people at any time, but at least on my time, by appointment.

I also have in front of me a newspaper article where we see that there will be demonstrations and even violence. Some completely wrong announcements are made, and in the five or six minutes remaining to me, I would like to analyze them with you.

"Bill C-105 is one of the worst attacks on our rights." That is totally false. It is a measure to protect all workers and employers who finance our plan, and you and me who work. Our measures protect them from people who choose not to work. The unemployed will continue to benefit from our unemployment insurance plan. That is guaranteed.

Second, "the changes give employers too much power", the "damn" employers. I hear that again and again. It has reached the point that employers are blamed for everything, but they pay \$4.25 for every \$100 of salary and the employee pays \$3. As someone who was an employer for 25 years, I personally had to deal with the blue forms. I find it rather a shame that it is always blamed on the employer. Once again, this is a false claim. The bill does not grant any power to employers. This is just not true. When a claim for benefits is submitted, UI officers give to both the employer and the claimant the same chance to provide the required information. The officer must hear both sides, that is the employer and the employee.

• (1850)

Moreover—and I did not hear this from the other side and I am sure some will intentionally avoid mentioning it—we give the benefit of the doubt to the claimant. Right now, things are not going well with the UI program. Bill C-105 will not solve all the problems which already exist. In his demagogic speech, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, who has been here for 25 years, said that employers could drastically change the conditions of employment for workers. That is false. It is false to claim that those measures will have that consequence. Such circumstances are already recognized in precedents as valid reasons for quitting a job.

All those who came to protest in our offices—and I must repeat that those who came to my office were extremely nice; in fact, I will meet them again on Monday—said that they were better informed when they left than when they arrived. They will probably come to see me more often. It is a pleasure for me to meet these people, as long as there are not 200 of them arriving together, because our offices cannot accommodate that many, not to mention the disturbance for our personnel.

Another one said all week that employers will be able to fire union people. This is what the ad says because it is those people who organize the protests. That is false. Any person fired for those reasons is entitled to UI benefits. Under the Unemployment Insurance Act, such union activities are not defined as misconduct. Unionization is a right. It is wrong to make such claims. It is in today's ad. In fact, it is in today's issue of *Le Devoir* and it says: "Let's fight unemployment, not its victims." That is pure provocation.

A fifth claim says that the victims of harassment—I often hear that one—and low income workers will not be able to leave their jobs to find a better one. That is false. Any victim of sexual harassment will be eligible for benefits. This protective measure was put in place by our government. When a person quits her job for a better one, it is not a voluntary termination of employment. Listening to all those who have spoken on this issue in the past week, you would think that all employers now engage in sexual harassment. I wonder about an employ-

Supply

er who has 2,000 people working for him. He must really be busy. Sexual harassment is the only thing they can come up with. It existed before and it will probably continue to exist after Bill C-105 is passed. We only hope that there is less and less of it and that people do not make abusive claims of sexual harassment. It is always the bosses. Do you think that an employer with 2,000 employees has control over absolutely everything? He probably does not even know his employees. I was a boss for 25 years and I can assure you that I often did things to please my employees, even though at times we were at the limit of legality and the legislation protected the employee more than the employer. You know, sometimes you have to buy peace.

Certainly there has been abuse. I have witnessed it in my life. I was an employer. What can I say? That is how things were done. Some will say, like the hon. member for Winnipeg who has left: "It is a form of insurance." Or they will argue: "I have paid UI all my life. You have to pay me benefits even if I do not qualify." That is not true. You pay your life insurance premiums, but if you commit suicide, the insurance will not pay up. It is dreadful to hear people say things like: "I have been contributing to the UI plan for 25 years, and now I have been cut off. I have been paying fire insurance on my house for 25 years. Since there has never been a fire at my place, I never collected on the insurance. I inquired of my agent, and he told me: 'Set the place on fire and we will pay up.'" He also warned me: "You better not get caught."

Mr. Speaker, I think the bill is sensible. The thing is to interpret it correctly and not to worry about it.

The government has a problem. It is collecting \$15 billion, but has to pay out \$22 billion. That is indeed a problem. I caution the unions looking to muddle the whole thing to be careful not to threaten our families which have nothing to do with this, our wives who have been alone for seven or eight days and our children who are truly defenceless. To these people, I say: "Watch out. Do not dare cross the threshold of my house, just in case—" One thing is sure, my family is not responsible for this bill.

Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): A five-minute question and comment period. The hon. member for Parkdale—High Park.

[*English*]

Mr. Jesse Flis (Parkdale—High Park): Mr. Speaker, I compliment the hon. member for Laval—Est, not for his contribution to this debate, but for being a good employer if he practised what he told us he practised. That is an employer.

The complaint I am getting from the chairman of metropolitan Toronto, Mr. Alan Tonks, is that the city is being killed economically by having to pick up the welfare costs, whether it is for the refugees that are coming or whether it is for people who are caught between jobs and unemployment. I have heard about that field process here and I heard about the just cause and not just causes. There will be people who either because of a waiting period or because they are not eligible have to live off something. They cannot starve to death in Canada.

In the Montreal area, just as in the Toronto area, I am sure these people will have to go on social assistance. I would like to hear from the hon. member whether the cities in Quebec are making the same complaint, that the federal government has abandoned its responsibility and is trying to shift the burden on to the local municipalities while at the same time it is looking very good because it says: "Look at what an efficient country we are running".

Mr. Della Noce: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague. I must tell him that the same exists in all the cities in Quebec. In some places it is worse for many other reasons. I do not know if they have the same demonstrations with the unions that took over the issue.

"They are going to control" said the people who came into my office this morning. They have orders to stay there. I said, who do you represent? Are you unemployed? I was told: "I represent everybody who works in the union from your riding". They came from 50 miles north of my riding, which was a little bit surprising.

They said what about the people who do not work and that we should take care of? They are not the workers. The workers are responsible because they pay the invoice. It is the same question which I ask people in the city. Of course the city mayor complains on many issues not only on this issue. They always need more. They have their problems too.

We have to be careful because this UI system is not an insurance which will solve all the problems. We collect \$15 billion and we need \$22 billion. Where will we get the money? The deficit we can always play with, but that is not our intention. To pick up the tab from the city, of course there is some, but this is not due to what the government is going to do. Before we had people who were starving on the 17 or 12 weeks period. Are we now trying to tell the people that everybody who leaves their job will be penalized? Wrong.

This morning in our caucus meeting, without giving all the details because we do not know what could be changed, I heard a lot of good news. The benefit of the doubt is never given to the employer. It is given to the second party which is the employee. If the employer says that the employee went out because of misconduct and the employee says it is because the employer changed his hours or because of other reasons, I can guarantee my hon. colleague that I will fight for this person and he will not be penalized, he will not be starving. On the other hand I can say I am fed up with waking up at 5 a.m. A lot of my people and a lot of employers have said they want to pay for the people who really need it. They say it is 1 per cent. It might be a little bit more. It does not matter how much it is, it is still too much. My employers said they pay \$4.20. To solve the problem what would it cost? I said \$8 and they do not like it, "We are going to freeze that there and we have to pick it up".

• (1900)

In the city it is the same problem with the employers who are fed up paying the UI unless they really need it. I am in agreement to pay UI for the people who are really starving, who need a job or they have lost their jobs and not quit their jobs voluntarily.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Saint-Julien (Abitibi): Mr. Speaker, to start with, I would like to respond to the unflattering comments the Liberal member for Hamilton East made about me. Usually, I do not pay attention to the criticisms coming from people who are misinformed, but today I will make an exception. It is true that I am not here to dodge criticisms coming from Liberal or other members, but I want to tell Canadians that I forgive the hon. member for Hamilton East for what she said. Forgive her, Lord, and let your light shine on her so she mends her ways. I consider the incident closed.

Supply

To come back to the motion of the Liberals which was tabled at the very last minute, this is not something which was proposed two or three weeks ago, or before the holiday season, this is a motion—and I want every Canadian to know it—which was tabled last night, five minutes before midnight, not fifteen, no, five to midnight. It reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government's policy of denying unemployment insurance benefits to workers who quit their jobs or who are dismissed is "too severe",—

Before Christmas, when Bill C-105 was tabled, I had consultations by phone from my office. During the holiday season I met in Amos, on December 23, people from la *Boîte à Copains*, ladies who were worried about Bill C-105. With my political assistants from Senneterre, Val-d'Or and Amos, we conducted a telephone survey and so on. During that period, I was quite apprehensive about Bill C-105. Therefore, I decided to tour my riding, and more precisely on January 12, 1993—

Mr. Prud'homme: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I must say to my hon. friend that I have known him for a very long time and I know he would not want to mislead the House or the Canadian people. The motion he referred to was tabled in accordance with our rules. It became official yesterday evening at six o'clock pursuant to the Standing Orders. Maybe the member read it at five to midnight yesterday, that is always possible in our offices, but the rules are very specific: pursuant to the Standing Orders, a minister of the Crown announced at the beginning of the week that Wednesday, therefore today, would be an allotted day. Consequently, according to our rules, we had until five o'clock yesterday evening to prepare for this opposition day.

If there were any surprises, they came from the hon. minister. That is also in the rules. In accordance with the Standing Orders, the minister of the Crown announced only Monday that today would be an opposition day. We had until five yesterday evening to study the question we would like to debate. It was tabled. I see the clerks of the House; they know this motion was tabled before six o'clock in accordance with our rules; otherwise it would not have been admissible. Therefore, whether we agree or not with what you said does not matter; we must not mislead the Canadians.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sure the hon. member is perfectly right. It is a point of order. We have resolved that. I will carry on with debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Saint-Julien: I took note of the hon. member's speech; he is very experienced in the House. I also note that this motion was tabled after December and January, in fact it was tabled at the beginning of February, on February 1, two months later. Lord forgive the Liberals for being late in presenting this motion.

As I was saying, I held some consultations. Before I did, I informed the local media, the unions and the workers what were the issues concerning eligibility for UI benefits. I explained to them, in several pages, what the bill was about and what the position of the government was. In this January press release, I even told the workers of my riding that in 1978 the Minister of Finance of the time, who is now Leader of the Opposition, had reduced the benefit rate of insurable earnings from 66 2/3 per cent to 60 percent. This was a reduction of 6 2/3 per cent. It was a regressive measure because it applied immediately to everyone receiving UI benefits and all new claimants.

I also explained UI costs, the reduction of UI premiums for new jobs and that we had to invest in resources. I also mentioned just causes for dismissals and the reduction from 60 to 57 per cent. After these consultations, I said that I would check on all those things in my riding while continuing a tour of Amos, Malartic, Senneterre, Matagami, Joutel, Val-d'Or and Barraute. The tour lasted a few days. I listened and met people, workers, unemployed people, mothers, residents of my riding who told me: "We would like you to write a letter to the minister and tell him what we want him to know."

I would like to pass on to you some of the comments made by people of Abitibi to the effect that the federal government is not contributing a penny to the UI fund; that, as early as 1990, with Bill C-21, the federal government had extended the waiting period from 1 to 6

Supply

weeks to 7 to 12 weeks; that bringing the rate of benefits down from 60 to 57 per cent of the eligible earnings will severely penalize the middle class and the working poor; that the provisions of Part IV of the bill have to be amended; that it is the employers who fill in the reason for leaving on the record of employment, without any input from the workers; that the federal government will have to find another way to penalize those who abuse the system, perhaps with a system similar to the one for drunk drivers all these are things people told us.

I consulted the people in my riding, and my riding is the largest in all of the 10 provinces of Canada. I did not take any holidays. I spent my time in the field, because I wanted to hear what the people had to say and I will keep listening. They told me that the federal government should have consulted the people of Canada before introducing Bill C-105, that some employers, taking advantage of the fact that they receive piles of applications because of high unemployment, do not hesitate to give the boot to employees if they make the slightest mistake. The fact of the matter is that, in isolated areas north of Matagami, a foreman can summon an employee who is on his way out and assign him extra work to do before leaving. This happens. Five just causes are mentioned in Bill C-105. We learned this morning from the political assistants of the employment and immigration office that case law recognizes no less than 40 other just causes for quitting voluntarily.

Today, I did read the Liberal motion which was tabled two months late. The Bloc Québécois did not even table a motion and the same goes for the NDP. On the other hand, we hear them criticizing us on television, like the member from the other side of the river who comes here once in a while. We did not see the member for Hull-Aylmer today. We did not see him rise in the House. He was not here.

I have been mandated by my constituents from Abitibi, whom I have met and listened to. I have been asked to have Bill C-105 amended at second reading, in the legislative committee and at third reading, because of the workers as much as the employers and the unemployed but not because of a Liberal motion which was tabled yesterday at the last minute. I am not bound by a Liberal motion, a motion from the opposition. I am going to tell you why I will abstain from voting. It is because this motion is false and demagogic. Tonight, in deference to my constituents, concerns in Abitibi, I am going to

abstain from voting because I am looking forward to the study in the legislative committee and third reading. I am not doing it because of the Liberal Party of Canada, which has been out of the Abitibi riding for the past eight years.

• (1910)

Hon. André Ouellet (Papineau—Saint-Michel): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to intervene to ask the member for Abitibi a question.

Before asking him my question, I would remind him that I had the pleasure of receiving in my office Mr. Paul Robert, the provincial director for the reinforcing-steel erectors of the construction branch of the Quebec Federation of Labour, together with members of Local 777 who came to tell me about their total and complete opposition to this government bill which is very unfair to Canadian workers who, unfortunately, are losing their jobs.

I did tell Mr. Robert that the Liberal Party of Canada was opposed to this measure and when the bill is presented to the House, we will express our objection and opposition to it on behalf of workers in Quebec and throughout Canada. We will vote against it. We are not like some Conservative members who make statements denouncing this bill, but who go away so as not to be here for the vote.

I ask the hon. member for Abitibi this. How come he is trying to have the people believe today that this motion before us should not be? He should know very well that the opposition parties have only a few very limited opportunities to express their point of view, on opposition days designated by the government. Only when the government lets us decide what we will talk about in this House can we do that.

I ask the member, who sits on the government side, who determines the agenda. He knows very well that very often the government limits discussion on a bill. Why does he not let us vehemently oppose this bill? On behalf of the workers who may be affected in his own riding, will he have the courage to vote against this bill and support us this evening by saying that this motion condemning the government for this bill deserves the attention of this House and the support of all members, whether in opposition or on the government side, who really care about the interests of workers who at any time in their lives can become unemployed?

Mr. Saint-Julien: Mr. Speaker, I have not seen the hon. member for years. I am pleased to meet him tonight.

Further to his question, I would like to say that the motion now being debated fails to mention that the government's policy was not to pay unemployment insurance benefits any more to workers who quit their jobs or are dismissed. I remember that we voted on Bill C-21 a few years ago. Even some members of the Bloc Québécois voted in favour of just cause, on Division No. 104. They forgot to mention just cause in their motion tabled several days or weeks later in Parliament.

The hon. member has a great deal of experience. Five reasons qualify as just cause, but they forgot to talk about those reasons. They tell the people, "If you leave your job, you won't get unemployment insurance."

I am not tied to a Liberal motion. I am not a partisan of the other party; I am a member of this party. I did say that I would be vigilant on second reading, in the legislative committee and on third reading for the people of Abitibi and not for the people in the Liberal Party of Canada.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. He had a 10-minute speech and five minutes for questions or comments.

The hon. member for Papineau on a question of privilege.

[Translation]

Mr. Ouellet: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member started his comments by saying he had not seen me in a very long time. You know very well that in this House nobody is supposed to impute motives to members who may have responsibilities which take them outside the House of Commons.

I remind the hon. member that for months, with his colleague behind him, the hon. member for Outremont, I sat at the Bélanger-Campeau commission, and then at two parliamentary committees set up by his own Prime Minister to try to solve the constitutional issue, the Beaudoin-Edwards committee and then the Beaudoin-Dobbie committee.

I say to the hon. member—

Supply

An hon. member: Baloney.

Mr. Ouellet: —that his comment was quite improper. It denotes an ignoramus of the worst kind.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I believe that is sufficient. The hon. member for Abitibi.

[Translation]

Mr. Saint-Julien: Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order. I respect the hon. member. I am pleased to see him here. I apologize. I can see he is quite upset, he is furious. I absolve myself.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments and points of privilege are now terminated.

Mr. Sid Parker (Kootenay East): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Nickel Belt.

I welcome the opportunity to enter into the debate. We support the opposition motion. It is unfortunate that we must talk about unemployment insurance when we should be talking about employment programs. However we must do so because of the severe attack unemployment insurance has taken. It is especially directed against women and people who have left their jobs for various reasons. That type of attack is one that none of us from this side of the House can support. It is deplorable that the government should even consider it at this time.

Canada faces a severe unemployment crisis and I am shocked that this government has decided that the unemployed must suffer even more. The change to UI is a blatant attempt to blame workers who are scrambling for jobs in this difficult time of economic restructuring. Clearly the government should have instead focused its

Supply

efforts on creating new and lasting jobs by investing in people through training and skills upgrading. To simply cut people off from income support that they themselves have contributed to is not only unfair but it also places an enormous additional burden on the already strained unemployment insurance system.

There are more efficient ways to stem abuses in unemployment insurance than this blanket change, which will only cause more problems than it solves. Perhaps the government fails to realize that this change in UI is counter-productive. Such a policy option clearly reveals the Conservatives' short-sighted approach to economic development. The people who are cut off from UI will have less purchasing power, will pay less tax, and many will probably seek social assistance from the state.

How will this help build the future of the country? How will this measure save money and reduce the deficit? Shifting the burden to the provinces which must administer welfare from decreased federal transfer payments is a pretty weak and transparent strategy.

I would like to share with the House today the situation in my riding of Kootenay East. I am sure that the story in my riding reflects the larger picture across the country.

• (1920)

Since being elected in 1988, my constituency office has had over 800 complaints about the UI system. Such a statistic is by itself quite an indication of the serious problems that exist. Let me elaborate. These hundreds of constituents have needed to ask their member of Parliament for assistance with UI because there are major delays in simply processing their claims.

Some claims have taken up to 12 weeks to process. Other cases involve multiple requests from bureaucrats for the same information. Everyone in the House knows that there is a serious overload in the unemployment insurance system already. The effect of this latest change will only add even more appeals and the unemployed will have to wait even longer to find out their status. Such stress and confusion are the last things Canadians need right now.

I have asked the Minister of Employment and Immigration many times to increase the staff in my riding's manpower centre in order to deal with the increasing caseload. However the minister has failed to act and the

situation worsens every day as more and more people find themselves unemployed.

It has even removed the toll-free telephone number so that people living 500 kilometres away from the manpower centre cannot even phone in to get the information that is required. It has cut back in the services at the desk. Adding this kind of bureaucracy over and above it is going to create even more for those who are entitled to their benefits.

In the Elk Valley area in my riding, there has been an economic shutdown for the last nine months. Radical restructuring in the coal mining industry has thrown hundreds of people out of work. The B.C. Supreme Court prohibited one company from reopening its mine because of bankruptcy. However, when the workers applied for UI benefits, the federal government ruled that they were ineligible. Finally, some months later when the company dissolved, the workers were given UI.

These workers then appealed for the lost benefits for the time the company fell into bankruptcy protection. Now, several months later, they have won their first stage of the appeal. The final resolution will take much more time because the government is going to overrule that appeal.

The government sent its top representatives from Vancouver into that area. One thousand workers lost benefits for over two and a half months and have been told by unanimous decision that they were entitled to it. I saw the member for Macleod get up. His riding adjoins my riding and has 300 of those workers. He stood up and agreed with the minister of state when she said the benefit will be given to the applicants.

I say to that member: "Why are you representing those 300 workers?" Those workers are having their houses foreclosed. Those workers have now lost their jobs, holiday pay and severance pay and the plant has gone into bankruptcy. A new buyer has come in and has said that it is not even going to rehire some of them. They are advertising in Alberta for new people and there are 1,000 of them sitting without unemployment insurance.

It was said that it was not a bankruptcy. The courts ruled that it was a bankruptcy. I wrote to the minister who oversees unemployment insurance and said that these people qualify. The minister said that they do not qualify. Finally, after the period from May 24 to August 25, it was decided that these people were entitled to it. They have now appealed and they have been notified

that their appeal has won a unanimous decision. Now the government is going to appeal that.

When I see and hear the Minister of state say in this House that the benefit of the doubt will go to the workers, I say to that minister and the member from Macleod that those 300 workers in the Macleod riding do not feel that they have been given the benefit of the doubt. This is a situation where this new bill is being brought in to deal with probably 1 per cent who are cheating the system. The whole unemployment program will become stagnant because people will be dealing with all those at the desk to find out whether they qualify or not. I say to each member of Parliament that they are going to have more and more of the unemployed coming into their offices and asking for assistance because of the delays that are taking place.

That is not acceptable. Canadians need a government that understands that the best way to increase productivity and competitiveness is by providing security and not by eroding the safety net. I implore the government to reconsider and retract this ill-designed measure.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Marc Robitaille (Terrebonne): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the NDP member who said with much emphasis and emotion that this government was pushing the unemployment insurance system into bankruptcy. In fact, it is quite the opposite. According to the figures, if we set aside the proposed measures, the unemployment insurance fund will have a \$8.5 billion deficit. If we do take these measures, we limit the deficit to \$7.5 billion. We take this type of measure to keep the unemployment insurance system from failing.

It is very well for the opposition to rise and talk about bankruptcy. If you want to talk about that, you should look at what the New Democratic Party is doing in Ontario, a true example of a province about to go bankrupt. If you examine the measures taken by the NDP Government of Ontario, you will find that in some respects they are not all that different. When you assume power, you must make decisions and take on responsibilities. It is easy enough to come here and tell us that our measures are inadequate, that we must vote against Bill C-105.

Supply

Furthermore, let us not forget that Bill C-105 will also freeze the salaries of members of Parliament and civil servants. My question is quite simple. Since the hon. member states in this House that this initiative is unacceptable, the other option would have been to raise by 20, 30, or 40 per cent all the contributions of workers and the employers. It is all too easy to stand in this House and tell the Canadian people that what the government did is bad. How would the NDP members solve the problem? We have a real problem on our hands right now, but you never talk about that. My colleague never says a word about the unemployment insurance fund deficit. It is quite obvious that this government will never let it run out of control like the Liberals did.

[English]

Mr. Parker: Mr. Speaker, surely the member must realize that if these people do not get unemployment insurance they are going to go to their municipalities or to the province to request some assistance. They have paid for this. These workers I am talking about have paid for this unemployment insurance for the past 10 or 12 years and never collected it. Now they have an opportunity to collect their insurance.

Mr. Robitaille: Give us a solution.

Mr. Parker: I will tell you where the solutions are. When the member's government brought in Bill C-21 and removed itself as a contributor to the unemployment insurance scheme and put the burden on the workers and on the employers, you created the problem of the deficit of that situation. It had no right to turn that over to the municipalities and the provinces to provide social assistance to fulfil the unemployment insurance program that is supposed to be in place as a safety net. We should be creating employment opportunities for workers and not unemployment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Questions and comments are now terminated. Debate. This is the second half of the 20 minutes.

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I came to this House the same year you did in 1972. I am quite sure you remember. It is very important to have an historical perspective on unemployment insurance.

Supply

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I would just like to tell the hon. member that I came here in 1968, but that is okay.

• (1930)

Mr. Rodriguez: I thank you for the correction, Mr. Speaker, but you were here when I came here and remember 1971 very vividly. There was a Liberal government and, Mr. Speaker, you sat on the same side of the House that I am now sitting on. Bryce Mackasey was the Minister of Employment and Immigration and was responsible for the Unemployment Insurance Act. Do you remember that well?

He sat there on the front rows, the right hand to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, and in 1971 he introduced a very comprehensive and expanded universal unemployment insurance program. It not only expanded the coverage for unemployment insurance to include the Armed Forces and school teachers who were not previously covered, but also expanded the social programs covered by the UI program.

That was when we got maternity benefits. We got sick benefits. Guess what? The program was funded by employers, employees, and the government.

Under the 1971 act the federal government picked up unemployment insurance costs when the unemployment rate was above 4 per cent.

At that time 4 per cent was considered full employment and the government picked up any costs to the unemployment insurance fund over 4 per cent. The member for Gander remembers that very well.

We had a very progressive program, probably one of the most progressive unemployment insurance programs in the world.

The Liberals were in power from 1972 to 1974 and from 1974 to 1979.

Mr. Marchi: We are coming back, Johnny.

Mr. Rodriguez: That is what really scares me, brother.

This is a swan song for a bunch of dead ducks over here. I am not concerned about them. I have my eyes focused on the Liberals and they are who really concern me because of what they have done to the UI program.

I have watched the debate on this motion, which calls this action of the government too severe, too tough for people and on and on. I want to put this in historical perspective because none of what is being done now

came out of nowhere. In fact, as unemployment started to increase to 6 per cent there was a whole series of changes to the act. Bryce Mackasey was removed from the portfolio and given another one, the post office. Lo and behold because the unemployment rate was increasing to 6 per cent they introduced an amendment that said they would pick up the costs of the unemployment rate beyond 6 per cent. When unemployment went beyond 6 per cent they introduced another amendment to the act so that instead of requiring eight weeks of insured earnings to collect UI benefits they introduced a variable entrance requirement ranging from 10 to 14 weeks.

The member for Gander remembers that very well. He was there when they made the arguments that they were penalizing those Canadians who lived in single-industry towns or in parts of the country that were economically depressed.

Then in 1978 they appointed Bud Cullen to be Minister of Employment and Immigration. He was responsible for the unemployment insurance fund. That is when they started to stick it to the unemployment insurance fund. The Liberals started to cut the program back. I want Canadians who are watching to understand that.

The Liberals can saw on the violin all they want but Canadians must recognize that they are masters at cutting back the unemployment insurance fund. The Liberals were just as cruel to the unemployed at the time as the Tories are today.

What did Bud Cullen bring in? He brought in the change which said that the benefit rate was reduced from 66 2/3 per cent to 60 per cent. He went from 66 2/3 to 60 per cent. The Tories only brought it down 3 per cent. The Liberals brought it down a full 6 per cent.

I am glad the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce is here because he and I sat as the UI critics against this government in 1984, 1985 and 1986. All of the ideas to chop the UI did not start with Tories and Forget. They started over here. Once Bryce Mackasey left the portfolio, they started to chop the unemployment insurance program. Then they brought in Bud Cullen. He really brought in the changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act. He reduced it from 66 2/3 to 60 per cent. Then he required higher entrance requirements. Anyone who did not have 14 weeks of insurable employment in the year preceding the qualifying period was now required to have 20 weeks. We will remember the 20 weeks.

I have to make sure that people understand that the Liberals are not going to restore anything to unemployment insurance. Let us understand that perfectly.

The Whip for the Liberal Party is looking at me. I say to him: "I know, brother, you want to win and you are prepared to say anything and do anything". We saw that with the GST: "Do not call me now, call me after the election". They want to put a tax on food. We have got to reveal them for what they are. Chameleons, that is what they are. They started the cutback on the unemployment insurance program.

A repeater now had to work the variable entrance requirement plus one week for each week of benefits received in excess of the variable entrance requirement up to a maximum of six weeks. They dealt with the repeaters and here they are beating their breasts and being so farcical about their attempt to cut off workers who quit. In fact, the Liberals are the ones who started decimating the unemployment insurance fund.

I say to people who are watching tonight: "Look, they are the masters. Put the cameras on them. Let us reveal them for who they are. Let us show them up for who they are". They made sweeping changes from 1978 to 1979 with Bud Cullen. I remember the member from Gander and I shoulder to shoulder, cheek to cheek, fighting in the trenches, fighting these changes. The Tories on the committee were in favour of them. They were tacit in their opposition. We carried the fight against those changes.

I am here to see an amendment or a motion brought by the opposition Whip condemning Tories for all the things that they did. All the language that I used, if you read my speeches, Mr. Speaker, going back to 1978, said that the changes the Liberals were bringing in were too severe. I said that they were too tough for people. I said it puts people in a desperate situation. I said it went beyond fairness. I said it was extreme and that it was the right-wing Liberals that were gaining ascendancy in the Liberal Party and it was unacceptable to the Canadian people.

Supply

I said all those things about the Liberal changes to the Unemployment Insurance Act back in 1978. They have some gall. How can they look themselves in the mirror?

Mr. Speaker, I move:

That the motion be amended by adding the following words after the words "who are dismissed is", "an abandonment of the principle that unemployment insurance is an insurance program and thus is".

• (1940)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): The Chair has no difficulty with this amendment.

Mr. Ronald J. Duhamel (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I want hon. colleagues to observe that yesterday a member of the NDP asked us whether or not we would change a particular piece of legislation once we got into power.

Today, with the passion of the member who just spoke and admitting that the Liberals are likely to form the government, I take it that the NDP has conceded. I would want everyone to note that.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would care to comment on this. It seems to me that when I last looked at the policy of the NDP with respect to tuition fees, it was that they should not exist in Ontario. Could my hon. colleague tell me what Premier Rae did to students? Would he also refresh my memory—

Mr. Whittaker: A point of order.

Mr. Duhamel: No, no, I am asking him some questions. Please calm down.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Order, please.

Mr. Whittaker: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. The member for St. Boniface is talking about something I cannot see has anything to do with unemployment insurance and I am sort of concerned about where it will lead us.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sure he was going to get to that point.

Mr. Duhamel: You are quite right, Mr. Speaker. My logic is sound. His intellect may not be, but I was about to get to the point.

Supply

I wondered whether my colleague would be kind enough to tell us what Premiers Harcourt and Romanow have done with respect to hospitals, colleges and universities.

My question to the hon. member, after he has taken the time to answer those very serious questions about the performance of NDP governments now in power and cut out the baloney and the crap, does he think that after all of the counselling that we have given the government, it will take some of the advice from both his party and my party with respect to unemployment insurance benefits for workers who need them? I hope he would be very serious in his response.

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, I know this is the way the old line parties do it: They ask a question, they answer it for you and then tell you, you are wrong.

I am going to answer his question. He prefaced his question by talking about the polls and how they are ahead in the polls. The arrogance of Liberals. I want you to know that after my speech tonight your polls are going down.

An hon. member: What?

Mr. Rodriguez: Your polls are going down. He asked me something about tuition fees. Let me put it this way. I am the federal member of Parliament for Nickel Belt. This is the federal Parliament. Liberals have sat over there. Liberals have had their hands on the levers of power for the best part of the last 25 years. Now they are over here and the Tories are there. When we get to power, if we do what you fellows have done then we deserve to be criticized. In the meantime, I do not want the hon. member drawing these red herrings.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): It being 7.45 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply pursuant to Standing Order 81(14).

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Call in the members.

The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:

(Division No. 402)

YEAS

Members

Allmand	Althouse
Anawak	Angus
Arseneault	Assad
Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing)	Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)
Baker	Barrett
Bélair	Bellemare
Benjamin	Berger
Bevilacqua	Black
Blackburn (Brant)	Blaikie
Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean)	Boudria
Breaugh	Brewin
Butland	Caccia
Campbell (South West Nova)	Catterall
Chrétien	Clancy
Comuzzi	Copps
Crawford	de Jong
Dingwall	Dionne
Duceppe	Duhamel
Edmonston	Ferguson
Finestone	Fisher
Flis	Fontana
Foster	Fulton
Punk	Gaffney
Gagliano	Gardiner
Gérin	Gray (Windsor West)
Guarnieri	Harb
Harvard	Harvey (Edmonton East)
Heap	Hopkins
Hovdebo	Hunter
Jordan	Karpoff
Karygiannis	Keyes
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas)	Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Kristiansen	Langan (Mission—Coquitlam)
Langdon (Essex—Windsor)	Laporte
LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso)	Leblanc (Longueuil)
Lee	MacAulay
MacDonald (Dartmouth)	MacLaren
MacLellan	MacWilliam
Maheu	Manley
Marchi	Martin (Lasalle—Émard)
McCurdy	McGuire
McLaughlin	Mifflin
Mills	Mitchell
Murphy	Nault
Nunziata	Nystrom
Ouellet	Pagtakhan
Parker	Peterson
Phinney	Pickard
Plamondon	Proud
Prud'homme	Rideout
Riis	Robinson
Rocheleau	Rodriguez
Rompkey	Samson
Simmons	Skelly (North Island—Powell River)

Skelly (Comox—Alberni)
Stewart
Taylor
Tremblay (Rosemont)
Volpe
Wappel
Wood

Speller
Stupich
Tobin
Venne
Walker
Whittaker
Young (Beaches—Woodbine)—122

NAYS

Members

Anderson	Andre
Atkinson	Beatty
Belsher	Bernier
Bertrand	Bird
Bjornson	Blackburn (Jonquière)
Blais	Bosley
Bouchard (Roberval)	Bourgault
Boyer	Brightwell
Browes	Cadieux
Campbell (Vancouver Centre)	Cardiff
Casey	Chadwick
Champagne (Champlain)	Charest
Chartrand	Clark (Yellowhead)
Clark (Brandon—Souris)	Clifford
Cole	Collins
Corbeil	Corbett
Côté	Couture
Crosbie (St. John's West)	Danis
DeBlois	de Cotret
Della Noce	Desjardins
Dobbie	Domm
Dorin	Duplessis
Edwards	Epp
Fee	Feltham
Ferland	Fontaine
Gray (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine)	Greene
Guilbault	Gustafson
Halliday	Harvey (Chicoutimi)
Hawkes	Hicks
Hockin	Hogue
Holtmann	Horner
Horning	Hudon
Hughes	James
Jelinek	Johnson
Joncas	Jourdenais
Kempling	Koury
Landry	Langlois
Larivière	Layton
Lewis	Littlechild
Loiselle	Lopez
MacDonald (Rosedale)	MacDougall (Timiskaming—French River)
MacKay	Malone
Marin	Martin (Lincoln)
Masse	Mayer
Mazankowski	McCreath
McDermid	McKnight
Merrithew	Mitges
Monteith	Moore
Mulroney	Nicholson
O'Kury	Paproski
Porter	Pronovost
Redway	Reid
Reimer	Ricard
Richardson	Robitaille
Roy-Arcelin	Schneider
Scott (Victoria—Haliburton)	Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth)
Shields	Siddon
Sobeski	Soetens
Sparrow	Stevenson
Tardif	Tétreault
Thacker	Thompson
Thorkelson	Tremblay (Québec—Est)
Tremblay (Lotbinière)	Turner (Halton—Peel)
Van De Walle	Vankoughnet
Vézina	Vien
Vincent	Weiner

Supply

Wenman
Wilbee
Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia)
Wilson (Etobicoke Centre)
Worthy—139

White
Winegard

PAIRED—MEMBERS

Cooper
Fretz
Gauthier
Parent

Darling
Friesen
Milliken
Vanclicf

• (2020)

Mr. Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[Translation]

The next question is on the main motion.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Speaker: All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

Mr. Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

Mr. Speaker: In my opinion, the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division:

(Division No. 403)

YEAS

Members

Allmand	Althouse
Anawak	Angus
Arseneault	Assad
Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing)	Axworthy (Winnipeg South Centre)
Baker	Barrett
Bélair	Bellemare
Benjamin	Berger
Bevilacqua	Black
Blackburn (Brant)	Blackburn (Jonquière)
Blaikie	Bouchard (Lac-Saint-Jean)
Boudria	Breaugh
Brewin	Butland
Caccia	Campbell (South West Nova)
Catterall	Chrétien
Clancy	Comuzzi
Copps	Crawford
de Jong	Dingwall
Dionne	Duceppe
Duhamel	Edmonston
Ferguson	Finestone
Fisher	Flis
Fontana	Foster
Fulton	Funk
Gaffney	Gagliano
Gardiner	Gérin
Gray (Windsor West)	Guarnieri

Supply

Harb
Harvey (Edmonton East)
Hopkins
Hunter
Karpoff
Keyes
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Langan (Mission—Coquitlam)
Laporte
Leblanc (Longueuil)
MacAulay
MacLaren
MacWilliam
Manley
Martin (Lasalle—Émard)
McGuire
Mifflin
Mitchell
Nault
Nystrom
Pagtakhan
Peterson
Pickard
Proud
Rideout
Robinson
Rodriguez
Samson
Skelly (North Island—Powell River)
Speller
Stupich
Tobin
Venne
Walker
Whittaker
Young (Beaches—Woodbine)—123

Harvard
Heap
Howdebo
Jordan
Karygiannis
Kilger (Stormont—Dundas)
Kristiansen
Langdon (Essex—Windsor)
LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso)
Lee
MacDonald (Dartmouth)
MacLellan
Maheu
Marchi
McCurdy
McLaughlin
Mills
Murphy
Nunziata
Ouellet
Parker
Phinney
Plamondon
Prud'homme
Riis
Rocheleau
Rompkey
Simmons
Skelly (Comox—Alberni)
Stewart
Taylor
Tremblay (Rosemont)
Volpe
Wappel
Wood

Lopez
MacDougall (Timiskaming—French River)
Malone
Martin (Lincoln)
Mayer
McCreath
McKnight
Mitges
Moore
Nicholson
Paproski
Pronovost
Reid
Ricard
Robitaille
Schneider
Scott (Hamilton—Wentworth)
Siddon
Soetens
Stevenson
Tétreault
Thompson
Tremblay (Québec—Est)
Turner (Halton—Peel)
Vankoughnet
Vien
Weiner
White
Wilson (Swift Current—Maple Creek—Assiniboia)
Wilson (Etobicoke Centre)
Worthy—138
MacDonald (Rosedale)
MacKay
Marin
Masse
Mazankowski
McDermid
Merrithew
Monteith
Mulrone
O'Kurley
Porter
Redway
Reimer
Richardson
Roy—Arcelin
Scott (Victoria—Haliburton)
Shields
Sobeski
Sparrow
Tardif
Thacker
Thorkelson
Tremblay (Lotbinière)
Van De Walle
Vézina
Vincent
Wenman
Wilbee
Winegard

PAIRED—MEMBERS

Cooper
Fretz
Gauthier
Parent
Darling
Friesen
Milliken
Vanciel

NAYS

Members

Anderson
Atkinson
Belsher
Bertrand
Bjornson
Bosley
Bourgault
Brightwell
Cadieux
Cardiff
Chadwick
Charest
Clark (Yellowhead)
Clifford
Collins
Corbett
Couture
Danis
de Cotret
Desjardins
Domm
Duplessis
Epp
Feltham
Fontaine
Greene
Gustafson
Harvey (Chicoutimi)
Hicks
Hogue
Horner
Hudon
James
Johnson
Jourdenais
Koury
Langlois
Layton
Littlechild
Andre
Beatty
Bernier
Bird
Blais
Bouchard (Roberval)
Boyer
Browes
Campbell (Vancouver Centre)
Casey
Champagne (Champlain)
Chartrand
Clark (Brandon—Souris)
Cole
Corbeil
Côté
Crosbie (St. John's West)
DeBlois
Della Noce
Dobbie
Dorin
Edwards
Fee
Ferland
Gray (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine)
Guilbault
Halliday
Hawkes
Hockin
Holtmann
Horning
Hughes
Jelinek
Joncas
Kempling
Landry
Larivière
Lewis
Loiselle

• (2030)

[English]

Mr. Speaker: I declare the motion lost.

Pursuant to Standing Order 45(5)(a), the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred division on the motion at report stage of Bill C-98, an act to provide additional borrowing authority for the fiscal year beginning on April 1, 1992.

* * *

BORROWING AUTHORITY ACT, 1992-93 (NO. 2)

MEASURE TO ENACT

The House resumed from Tuesday, February 2, consideration of Bill C-98, an act to provide additional borrowing authority for the fiscal year beginning on April 1, 1992, as reported (without amendment) from a legislative committee; and Motions Nos. 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Mr. Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. A vote on this motion also applies to Motions Nos. 2, 3 and 4.

The House divided on the motion, which was negatived on the following division: