

Unemployment Insurance

Mr. Desrosiers: Madam Speaker, I should like to ask our colleague the Hon. Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) whether he was present when the federal Government reopened the refinery he was referring to earlier in which millions of dollars were invested so that all the workers would get their job back.

Madam Speaker, furthermore I should like to ask him whether he remembers that three other refineries were closed down in Montreal East—of which time the Hon. Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie never objected to or challenged their closing nor stood up for the hundreds of thousands of workers whose jobs were lost in Montreal East.

I hope that the Canadian people who are listening today will remember that when the three refineries which were closed down under the Liberal Government—the Hon. Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie never stood up in the House to defend these hundreds of thousands of employees. And today he rises in the House to blame us for the closing of the Gulf refinery. May I remind him that he was here when we reopened the Gulf refinery and giving back their jobs to all former employees, Madam Speaker.

Mr. Malépart: Madam Speaker, I am under the sad impression the Hon. Member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve (Mr. Desrosiers) will go back to singing, because he just proved clearly that, as people in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve say, he did not do his homework on the Gulf refinery. He should have attended more regularly the Survival Committee and defend the rights of people in Hochelaga, Mercier, Rosemont; if he had done so, he would know the Gulf refinery facilities reopened thanks to the provincial government.

The Hon. Member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve is not aware of it, unfortunately but quite understandably because he is present neither in Ottawa nor in his constituency, but half of the Gulf refinery employees are still laid off.

As a concrete example and proof, it is not for nothing that employees of a shut-down company have to send letters to the editors in district newspapers in order to meet the Hon. Member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

And despite what the Hon. Member just said about the Gulf refinery, only 50 per cent of employees got their jobs back there. The Federal Government did nothing—it was a Cabinet decision to shut the Gulf refinery down.

In conclusion, Madam Speaker, I wish the Hon. Member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve (Mr. Desrosiers) had risen and said "The Hon. Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie is right". There are senior workers in the constituency of Hochelaga. Two plants are shutting down in the constituency of Hochelaga. I would have expected that the Hon. Member would rise and tell the Minister of Employment and Immigration: You are wrong, because older Hochelaga—Maisonneuve workers at the two companies that are closing down will not be entitled to full unemployment insurance. His role and his duty today would have been to rise and defend them. My conclusion

is that he preferred to remain seated rather than defend his constituency, and the people will get rid of him soon.

• (1240)

[English]

Mr. Robison: Madam Speaker, thousands of members of the Canadian Armed Forces from across Canada, including my constituency of Burnaby as well as others, including the Hon. Member who just spoke, are deeply concerned. They feel betrayed by the Government's policy on unemployment insurance. We know, because of Armed Forces policy, that these people are forced to retire at an age when in many cases they want to continue working. Despite that and despite the fact they are actively seeking employment, government policy denies them unemployment insurance. In some cases they have paid into the unemployment insurance program for many, many years. To me it is a betrayal of the members of Canada's Armed Forces and a breach of the contract they made with the Government to tell them they are not eligible for unemployment insurance benefits now. This Bill continues to exclude those people from coverage and makes an arbitrary division between those who retired before January 5 and those who retired after.

It is in that light that I want to ask the Hon. Member for Montreal—Sainte-Marie (Mr. Malépart) why he and his colleagues in the Liberal Party support this legislation. I am amazed that the Liberal Party is prepared to put its principles behind it and vote in support of this Bill despite the fact that it slams the door on thousands of Canadians who are entitled to unemployment insurance. How can Liberal Members stand up in good conscience, in principle, and support this Bill when it is so deeply flawed and denies unemployment insurance to so many Canadians who have legitimately earned it?

[Translation]

Mr. Malépart: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and I thank the Hon. Member for it. We must keep reminding ourselves of what the Government did, what the situation was before January 5, 1986, and what the proposals are.

Before January 5, 1986, there was no difference made between income from an employer—employee or any other kind of pension plan, as far as unemployment insurance benefits were concerned. The decision made by this Government after January 5, 1986, is that not only our Armed Forces personnel, our people in the RCMP—and it is not my first responsibility to defend those people, I am thinking of all the older workers—those people found a new job, they kept on paying full unemployment insurance contributions, but they were not eligible to benefits.

What is the gain made by older workers under Bill C-50? This afternoon those people will be here. In the first place, all those affected by the decision of January 5, 1986 will get a refund. Secondly, there is a step forward, that is those who continued to make unemployment insurance contributions and were not eligible to receive benefits, will now be eligible.