

he had other points he wanted to make. Would there be a disposition in the House to provide unanimous consent to allow him to finish his remarks?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is there unanimous consent to give the Hon. Member for Nickel Belt (Mr. Rodriguez) time to finish his remarks?

Some Hon. Members: Agreed.

Some Hon. Members: No.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak this motion. In fact, in seventeen months this must be the twenty-fifth motion tabled on the subject in the House of Commons. I think Canadians and parliamentarians, especially Conservative Members whose memories tend to be rather short, should recall it all started on January 5, 1986. Before January 5, 1986, if a worker, old or young, lost his job by reason of termination of employment or because he agreed to take early retirement and let a younger person take over his job, as an alternative to laying off people, and if he was then in a position to look for another job, he had the right to draw full unemployment insurance benefits, notwithstanding any income from an employer-employee pension plan or severance pay following the closing of a plant.

Unfortunately, on January 5, 1986, not by a decision adopted in the House of Commons but by regulatory order, supported by Cabinet, including the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney), this Government decided—

Mr. Boudria: It was Brian's doing!

Mr. Malépart:—without any notice whatsoever, without informing parliamentarians, without informing the workers, the Government decided that as of January 5, 1986, income from pension plans to which these people had contributed would be considered as earnings and their unemployment insurance benefits cut accordingly.

This immediately affected 35,000 workers in Canada. The decision, made without prior notice, was arbitrary and it was unfair. From then on, after protest movements were organized in Quebec, the Liberal Party, at the request of its Leader (Mr. Turner), got together with these coalitions to force the Government to change its course. And we know what happened. The pressure was on. We even had a change of Ministers, when the former Minister became Minister of Communications, and the Hon. Member for Roberval became Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard). At that point, all this Government could say was: Well, we are going to ask the Forget Commission to tell us whether we are right or wrong. And that was because not a single Conservative Member in this House had the guts to tell the Minister: You are wrong. The money belongs to those workers. It's their money. It's the employers' money. It came out of their pockets.

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971

The money doesn't belong to the former Minister of Employment and Immigration, the Minister of Communications (Miss MacDonald), and it doesn't belong to the Prime Minister. It belongs to the workers. The Conservatives said: Forget Forget. If you got your benefits, you will have to pay them back.

Mr. Speaker, not a single Conservative Member rose in the House at that time. Elderly workers had to come here to Parliament Hill to challenge the Government. They were unemployed and they had to spend money to come here. They were losing money every two weeks because the Government didn't give them their full benefits. These people had to pay \$20 or \$25 to charter a bus and come and challenge the Government because they could not have meetings with their Members in their ridings. There were pressures from the representatives of ARSAC, from Mr. Cloutier, Mrs. Lalonde, Mr. Fortin of Montreal, and from representatives of our military. After three manifestations on Parliament Hill and after publication of the Forget Commission Report, the Government was told: "You were wrong; Mr. Prime Minister, you are wrong; you have to reimburse these people; you cannot change the rules in the middle of the game." Did you ever hear of someone who has automobile insurance being told after an accident: "I am sorry, but the rules have changed and you can get compensation only after your second accident. Go and have another accident, and when you lose your other leg, come back and see us; we shall pay you for both." This is silly, but it is what the Conservative Government wanted to do.

We have won half the battle, thanks to the Leader of the Liberal Party, who asked the members of his party to fight as long as something could be done to obtain fair treatment for older workers. Unfortunately, in spite of the pressures exerted by the Official Opposition, by the labour organizations, by the Forget Commission, which cost \$6 million of taxpayers' money and whose recommendations were rejected out of hand by the Government, and by the Committee on Employment and Immigration, including its Conservative members, with the exception of the Hon. Member for Jonquière (Mr. Blackburn)—In passing, I would like to congratulate the Hon. Member for Laprairie (Mr. Jourdenais), even though I cannot congratulate his other colleagues who have been content to do nothing publicly while leading us to believe in private that they were doing something, because he at least was not afraid to defend these workers and to tell the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard) and the Prime Minister that they were wrong.

Unfortunately, what the Government has given us is even more shocking than the amounts spent on shoes by the Prime Minister. It is shocking to think that all the workers over 55 who are laid off following the closing of a plant, whether on the South Shore, in the Quebec riding, in the Richelieu riding or anywhere else in Canada, are being told: "My dear sir or madam, you are not entitled to your full unemployment insurance benefits as are other workers because the Conservatives have decided that the pension contributions you paid while you were working is not an investment, but earned