

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.

Supply

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.