

Oral Questions

RESPONSIBILITY OF PARLIAMENT

Mr. Ian Deans (Hamilton Mountain): Does the Deputy Prime Minister understand that in the letter it says that: "—circumstances may arise that call for an impartial person to conduct an investigation as to fact"? It goes no further than that. Is he not aware that the Prime Minister also goes on to say that the "—responsibility of government and the supremacy of Parliament are respected and reinforced", and that that supremacy and responsibility require that Parliament make the judgment as to ethical standards of Members of Parliament in the House of Commons?

Hon. Erik Nielsen (Acting Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. gentleman knew the system and this place better than that.

Mr. Deans: I know it very well.

Mr. Nielsen: He is omitting to say that, in addition to the code that will be looked at by an impartial person investigating the facts, are the letter of September 9, and all of the allegations that have been made over the course of at least two and a half weeks. With respect to the point about Parliament, the Hon. Member will appreciate that the option is there for the report to be referred to a standing committee of this House.

Mr. Deans: Where is the option?

Mr. Nielsen: The hon. gentleman says "Where is the option?" It is inherent in the prerogative of the Prime Minister which we are dealing with here.

Mr. Blackburn (Brant): It's in invisible ink.

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[Translation]

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

INQUIRY WHETHER GOVERNMENT IS WILLING TO WITHDRAW
RETROACTIVE PROVISION CONCERNING BENEFITS

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

This morning, more than 1,000 senior citizens were on Parliament Hill to protest the decision made by the Minister on January 5 to cut unemployment insurance benefits. Is the Minister willing to admit today that these people have been unfairly penalized, especially since, this morning, some people proved to us that their unemployment insurance benefits were now down to only \$12 a week? Is the Minister prepared to withdraw a retroactive measure that affects 34,000 people?

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I had an opportunity to meet the leaders of this group at noon, and we discussed their concerns. As you know, I have received a number of representations

from various groups on the same subject. That is why I have asked Mr. Forget to look into the details of this question and give me his recommendations.

INQUIRY WHY MINISTER DID NOT AWAIT FORGET COMMISSION
RECOMMENDATION BEFORE MAKING DECISION

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, we have this stupid reply from the Minister, while the people up there are losing 200—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Just the question!

Mr. Malépart: Mr. Speaker, does the Minister realize that the people who are here today are losing \$200 a month in income? Why did the Minister ask the Forget Commission's advice and cut unemployment insurance cheques? Why didn't she ask for a decision by the Forget Commission but let these people draw their cheques?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please!

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the amendments to these regulations were announced by the Minister of Finance in 1984, and as we all know, since that time we have debated the question here in the House and I am now waiting for Mr. Forget's recommendations.

REDUCTION IN BENEFITS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration, and it is prompted by today's demonstration by thousands of people on Parliament Hill.

Can the Minister explain why the Government continues to deny unemployment insurance benefits to pensioners in spite of the fact that, since early January, this Government policy has been rejected in practically all 400 appeals filed in Quebec against such cut-backs?

● (1440)

[English]

Hon. Flora MacDonald (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, a number of appeals have been heard by boards of referees. As Members will know, a number of decisions have been made upholding the claimants' appeals. A great many more decisions have been made which denied the appeals. Because of these conflicting rulings, the next step will be to refer the matter to a higher level of judicial review. That process is taking place.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Mike Cassidy (Ottawa Centre): Can the Minister explain why the Government has chosen to harass people who won their appeals before the arbitrator, by taking them to a higher court? This forces them to continue without the revenue which is their due. Why did she harass those people when in