

SITUATION OF SELF-EMPLOYED FISHERMEN

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, the test of leadership is to take difficult decisions during difficult times.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Dingwall: You may laugh across there—

Some Hon. Members: Order, order!

Mr. Speaker: The Hon. Member will address the Minister through the Chair.

Mr. Dingwall: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is for the Prime Minister. Self-employed fishermen are troubled and worried about their future. Will the Prime Minister stand in his place today and give an undertaking to the House that there will not be a termination of UI benefits for self-employed fishermen? Or will he allow his Minister of Transport to stand out on the wharf alone with regard to helping the people of Atlantic Canada? Make up your mind, Mr. Prime Minister.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, fishermen and forest workers in Atlantic Canada are concerned because the only approach you find to a basic problem like unemployment insurance is to scare people. That is what you are doing, and you cannot do anything else. You cannot do a thing!

[English]

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I must remind all Hon. Members, both those who are asking questions with vigour and enthusiasm and those Ministers who are answering with equal vigour and enthusiasm, to conduct their exchanges through the Chair.

[Translation]

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, what I want to suggest to the Hon. Members opposite is this: it is not good enough to play on people's fear by saying: You will do this, you will do that. Mr. Speaker, I indicated yesterday we would receive—

[English]

Mr. Dingwall: Have some guts and make a decision.

Mr. Speaker: I would ask all Hon. Members to let the Minister reply.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Bouchard: Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that an intelligent and serious examination of a matter like unemployment insurance requires that every option be assessed, and then only those that suit Canadians best be chosen. Instead of

Oral Questions

scaring people, try to co-operate with that serious examination we want to undertake.

ELIMINATION OF REGIONAL EXTENDED BENEFITS—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, I also have a question for the Minister of Employment and Immigration.

The Minister knows the Forget Commission recommended eliminating regionally extended benefits. If that recommendation were to be accepted by the Government, the people of Quebec would lose \$1 billion.

Is the Minister now ready to tell Quebecers he will reject that recommendation by the Forget Commission?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I told my fellow Quebecers the Government was working on a study of unemployment insurance, and that it would again take into account the monies that have been invested in that system. I repeat what the Prime Minister has said, and what has been repeated on a number of occasions: there is no question of reducing the monies, the funds we are investing in the unemployment insurance plan.

REQUEST THAT GOVERNMENT REJECT RECOMMENDATION

Mr. Lorne Nystrom (Yorkton—Melville): Mr. Speaker, a great deal of anxiety has been caused by the Forget Commission, and not by Opposition Members. Yes, a great deal of anxiety has been caused by that former Liberal Minister, Mr. Forget.

Can the Minister now tell Quebecers that he will reject that recommendation? That recommendation is very important for Quebec's future and for the constituency of Manicouagan, which has a high unemployment rate.

An Hon. Member: They will be getting a prison!

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the Hon. Member on the unavoidable insecurity problem caused by such a Royal Commission of Enquiry. I think everybody agree with that. This is why I said earlier it was regrettable that the Hon. Member should exploit that insecurity to try and suggest all sorts of things.

Clearly, in our assessment of the situation we will spare no effort to try and consider that there are people—and there are many of them in Canada, unfortunately, because not everybody is working—who have to live with the unemployment insurance problem, and we will endeavour to provide them with the best possible benefits. This Government's only intention is, not only to give them the best quality, but to improve as much as possible on what we are already giving them.