

*Tributes*

Yet I do not believe that this House has ever known, at least certainly not in my time, such a unique and exceptional member as Jean-Claude Malépart.

The day after Jean-Claude died an editorialist described our colleague as having been the voice of the voiceless, the messenger of the destitute, the spokesman for the ordinary man.

Mr. Speaker, our friend Jean-Claude was all that indeed, but he was also a militant and an activist, totally and fully given to helping the needy.

The list of cases handled and fights led by Jean-Claude is endless, as are his successes. We all remember the major issues which attracted national attention and which were the subject of often outstanding debates in this House.

First, Montreal East. Within a single month in the fall of 1985, no fewer than seven companies announced their intention to close their doors, thus depriving more than 5,000 workers of their jobs in a region which, in normal times, was already so unfavourably treated.

Jean-Claude took it upon himself to rally all interested parties. He set up the *Comité de survie de l'est de Montréal* with the workers of Vickers, Bombardier, Canadian Steel Wheels, Canadian Steel Foundries and Gulf Refinery, along with all politicians at every level, representing not only his riding, but the Greater Montreal region as well.

After weeks and months of tireless work Jean-Claude and his survival committee did succeed in slowing down and, finally, stopping the extensive economic decline which had been the hallmark of our region.

This tangible victory was won by solidarity, dedication and perseverance, three words that admirably describe the colleague we mourn today.

However, Jean-Claude fought for more than his riding and his region. He also defended the paper mills at Desbiens and Matane.

His vast campaign against cuts in unemployment insurance benefits for early retirees started in the area around the old capital, spread to cover the entire province of Quebec and finally took on national dimensions.

Across this country, he also fought his battle against deindexation and old age security pensions, a battle he won, and the one against deindexation of family allowance, which he unfortunately lost. He also waged a national campaign against a tax on bread and butter and a tax on medicine.

Finally, during the darkest days of his illness, he discovered how cuts on transfer payments to the provinces resulted in a decline in services for the ill, including those stricken with terrible diseases like cancer. Once again he went on the war path, demanding that the government take the budgets earmarked for two nuclear subs and spend those billions of dollars on medical research.

In most cases, he started his battles alone, sometimes giving the impression of being a voice crying in the wilderness.

I remember vividly his campaign for early retirees, whose unemployment insurance benefits had been cut by the government. It was just a few months after his historic and victorious battle against the deindexation of old age security pensions.

For months, the early retiree benefit cuts had been practically his only topic of conversation. Morning, noon and night, he tried to persuade colleagues, friends and reporters to join him in this struggle. Most refused to get involved since they felt it was a lost cause. Many explained that we were in the opposition and that he would not succeed in making the government retreat every time. However, he was not discouraged. He went on as though this fight were his first, or his last.

In time, he managed to get together a large number of these early retirees and instil in them the hope that they would be able to persuade the government to correct this injustice. Then he used his famous "hammer and nails" technique. Like the carpenter who hammers the head of his nail until it is properly sunk, Jean-Claude went into the fray, time and time again, with patience, energy and determination. He felt that what we had to do, both in and out of the House, was to keep on banging on the same nail over and over again.

He won one more time. Finally, the government re-imbursed 34 000 early retirees to whom it had unfairly denied benefits. This was great Jean-Claude Malépart in action.