

**Mr. Speaker:** It is agreed and so ordered.

• (1510)

[Translation]

**Hon. Martial Asselin (Charlevoix)** moved:

—That this House urges the government to expedite those public services which affect the quality of life so that entitlement to status and payment of benefits may be sooner established and paid, and in particular, in respect of unemployment insurance benefits, pension and assistance benefits, immigration and passport procedures, post office deliveries, and public service collective bargaining.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Standing Order 58 enables the opposition to introduce from time to time motions whereby it does not necessarily present only grievances, but also suggestions to the government.

From the beginning of the present session, Mr. Speaker, we have been surprised to see in this House the very defensive attitude of government members and the extent to which ministers apparently defending their policies readily flare up, turn red and often blast the opposition's attempts to be useful to them by practical suggestions liable to lead the government to efficient solution of problems now facing the people of Canada.

It can be wondered whether this is a symptom of the end of the present government, Mr. Speaker. Past experience has shown that when a government is always on the defensive—

**An hon. Member:** Like the Progressive Conservative party.

**Mr. Asselin:** —and refuses to fight, its hours are numbered.

Mr. Speaker, the present government is faced with the problems of unemployment and inflation which it has been unable to solve during its four years in office. The government, as I said earlier, is about to come before the people, asking for re-election.

For some time, we have seen the Prime Minister of Canada (Mr. Trudeau) roaming up and down the country—

**An hon. Member:** Like the Leader of the Opposition!

**Mr. Asselin:** —and trying to gauge voters' opinions on the themes that he should use in the next electoral campaign which in my opinion is to start soon.

Well, the Prime Minister can no longer say once more to the people that his objective is still to build a just society because this election slogan will never be accepted again by the Canadian people. What the government has done for the past four years is overwhelming evidence, I suggest, that never before have the citizens of this country suffered so much from blatant injustices that have so obviously affected their existence.

It would take too long to recite all the grievances that we could rightly state to demonstrate the correctness of this. To demonstrate the serious nature of those injustices, it would be enough to detail all the hardships and humiliations to which Canadians are subject because of the serious situation created not only by unemployment and cost of living increases but also by misunderstanding and care-

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lessness from the government in improving public services to which the people are entitled.

For these reasons, the official opposition has felt that it had a duty to remind the government of certain truths and to insist that it deal with the urgent problems that we are now facing.

From the opening of this session, we have badgered the government and particularly the Minister of Labour (Mr. O'Connell) about the delay in paying unemployment insurance benefits to eligible persons.

Over Christmas and New Year holidays, members of all sides of this House have received scores of telephone calls and visits to their offices from people at grips with these problems and who were asking for a remedy.

Day after day since the beginning of this session, my colleagues of the official opposition as well as those from the other opposition parties have urged the Minister of Labour and his parliamentary assistant to come to the aid of these people who were in deep misery owing to the treatment they were getting under the unemployment insurance scheme.

Mr. Speaker, referring back to page 2586 of *Hansard*, we find that the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt) asked the minister for some explanation of the delays in the payment of unemployment insurance benefits.

We can also refer back to page 2484 of the same publication where we can read the always interesting comments made by the hon. member for Prince Edward-Hastings (Mr. Hees) who asked the minister to do something to improve operations at the Toronto unemployment insurance office.

Hon. members from all provinces have made similar requests. After approximately two months of sittings, we are still talking about this problem. In fact, several hon. members of the opposition have asked the parliamentary secretary today when this problem would be solved.

Mr. Speaker, as far as unemployment insurance offices are concerned, this government made an error in attempting to centralize those offices thereby eliminating existing regional offices. The taxpayers are the victims of this policy. Since unemployment insurance offices are located in the big cities—and here I am speaking about my own constituency—people cannot cover a distance of 200 or 300 miles to meet officials and discuss their claim with them.

The telephone lines are busy all day long so that in addition to his normal duties a member has to act as placement agent for the unemployment insurance officials who have been transferred to the big cities.

Mr. Speaker, the delay in unemployment insurance payments caused flagrant cases of injustice and reduced to dire poverty a countless number of eligible people. I know of distressing cases in my riding. For instance, many heads of families applied for benefits during two months. Most of them had four or five children to support and could not get money from any source other than unemployment insurance because they did not qualify for welfare allowances.

Even if the minister said that he made arrangements with social welfare offices in order to help those people in great need, the public servant takes weeks to complete the