

Unemployment Insurance

person was unable to make the application on that date. As I understand it, there is that discretion.

Mr. Robinson: There is no discretion.

Mrs. Collins: It may indeed apply in this circumstance as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-50. I suggest it is important that everyone should remember why Bill C-50 was introduced in the first place. The fact that we now have a measure designed to make refunds or correct the mistakes of the Conservative Government does not in any way reflect the will of the Conservative Government nor of the Conservative Members, except for one or two.

First it must be recalled that on January 5, 1986—this was the outcome of a December 23, 1985 decision to make a Christmas gift—the Cabinet headed by the Prime Minister himself saw fit to cut off the unemployment insurance benefits to which older workers voluntarily or involuntarily opting for early retirement were entitled. For example, an older worker who lost his job because the plant shut down. He had the right to withdraw his pension plan contributions, so the Government decided to cut him off UI benefits because he was receiving pension benefits. The decision was officially made public on January 5, 1986 and we know that the ensuing wave of protests from Canadians generally and the the Official Opposition, the Liberal Party, forced the Government to take cover behind the Forget Commission, waiting for advice. We also know that on December 3, 1986 the Forget Commission told the Government: You are wrong, you must rescind these regulations and reimburse older workers. On December 5, two days later, the Minister of Employment and Immigration (Mr. Bouchard) did admit the Conservative Government had erred and he unveiled policy changes.

Sadly enough, when the Minister of Employment and Immigration made his announcement he failed to remove all discrimination and, a few months later, he showed us a questionnaire which was more like a request that older workers in fact denounce the officials who were alleged to have misinformed them. And so it was that strong representations made by ARSAC, by the coalition and by spokesmen for retired military personnel once again forced the Government to backtrack and withdraw the questionnaire after owning up to its monumental blunder.

● (1230)

The end result of all this was that on March 18, 17 months later, the Government agreed that it was completely mistaken, that it was wrong to seek to cancel UI benefits, particularly in the case of men and women who had vested rights, and on April 1 the Government introduced Bill C-50.

Unfortunately, once more, older workers had to put pressure on this Conservative Government. In each Conservative

constituency, they had to put pressure on their Members of Parliament to force the Government to debate this bill on June 9.

After fighting for seventeen months, older workers have won only part of the battle. For them, victory will come in two years when they defeat this Government. What they have won now, Madam Speaker, is that all workers who retired before January 5, 1986, voluntarily or not, and who filed a claim at their unemployment insurance office, and there are 35,000 of them, will be paid a total of \$65 million.

Unfortunately, there are still 2,500 people in Canada who, as my colleague for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine East (Mr. Allmand) has just reminded me, also took early retirement voluntarily or not before January 5, 1986. The most obvious example is the case of the Gulf refinery employees who lost their jobs because of this Conservative Government and this Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney). Because of this Prime Minister and this Government, these people have been denied their full unemployment insurance benefits. This is what happened when they filed a claim, Madam Speaker, as shown by the affidavits signed by people from all Quebec constituencies who have sent me postdated applications to prove that they went to their unemployment insurance office between September and November 1985 to file a claim, where they were told by unemployment insurance officials: "You have your separation pay and sick leave; when those have run out, you can come back and be eligible for unemployment insurance."

Once more, there is nothing for them in this Bill. Unfortunately, no Conservative Member is rising to defend these 2,500 people who are entitled to the full reimbursement of their unemployment insurance benefits because their case dates back to 1985. I trust that, when we move an amendment in committee, the Conservatives will rise to support this amendment so that all those who stopped working before January 5, 1986, will become eligible even if they did not go to their unemployment insurance office immediately. I have here a letter from a voter in a Conservative riding who has this to say: "I took early retirement on December 31, 1985. On January 1, 1986, Government offices were closed and the company office and staff were on holidays." This worker received his job separation form only on January 8, and when he went to the unemployment insurance office to file a claim, the Government would not let him.

There are hundred of cases in every constituency and this injustice will remain if the Government does nothing.

We all recall that the Government decided in secret to commit this injustice toward older workers by having an order in council published before the Christmas adjournment on December 23, so that no one would learn about it. The Cabinet had met with the Minister in secret to attack older workers, and all the Ministers who are here now were accomplices in that decision.