

*Government Orders*

was in opposition. In fact it has gone additionally in that area. It has now imposed means testing on some of the tax benefits to senior citizens. This is another example of getting away from universality. We could disagree with the specific mechanism but the drift is definitely there. In the case of unemployment insurance there has been an increase in benefits for lower income Canadians under some circumstances and a decrease for others.

• (1250)

The government is moving in all of these directions, and I repeat them: the reduction of payroll taxes, the return to a link between contribution and benefit in unemployment insurance, in other words, insurance principles and finally a move toward some targeting in this program and away from universality.

These are all positive aspects in our view. I also acknowledge they were difficult decisions. The changes will be significant for the people affected and this particular decision I am sure will not be an easy one for the government although it will have our support. I regret it is one of a very few difficult decisions contained in the budget.

I want to express one reservation. There is also a change which gives employees the benefit of the doubt when dismissed for misconduct. In our view it has the potential of encouraging employees to dispute all dismissals in the hope of collecting premiums. This could clog up the system and result in increased claims. We hope the government in committee will examine the direction it is going although I would acknowledge that some of the things the previous government did in that area were questionable.

Finally, we also acknowledge the need for the pilot projects that are part of the bill and we urge the government to keep the House current on the spending of this money and to report to the House evaluations of the success of these kinds of projects. Too often in the past we announce initiatives for the sake of lessening the impact of unpopular measures. These continue permanently, they are never properly evaluated and they end up being simply a way that we mitigate the effect of having tried to save money in the first place.

Having said those things, I regret we are unable to support the bill over all. There are many things we do support but do not support the bill over all because of its omnibus nature.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to comment very briefly on the position taken by the Bloc Quebecois regarding Bill C-17, an act to amend certain statutes to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 22, 1994.

I may add that most of the measures in this bill concern specific cuts in the government's budget, especially the government's proposed cuts in unemployment insurance.

Apparently, the Bloc is opposed to this bill, as it is opposed to any major changes proposed by the Reform Party which concern major government programs, and I find this disturbing, because I see a party that is in favour of the greatest change of all, the break-up of this country.

When we talk about federal programs, programs created under the federal system, our party is proposing major changes, while the Liberals are proposing changes that are as significant as ours, but when the government starts to discuss issues that are vital to the future of our country, we see that the Bloc is always opposed to these changes.

I find it hard to explain to my constituents why a party that cannot abide the Canadian federal system still supports federal programs and in fact supports the status quo.

• (1255)

The Bloc Quebecois is always prepared to recognize the benefits of federal programs and it does so clearly and incisively, but when it talks about what is wrong with the federal system and especially about the programs we are discussing here, they tend to lack that incisiveness. I must say that I find it hard to understand why they are opposed to the system, to the program in general, while they are not to specific cases.

[*English*]

I hope that we will get a better understanding of these positions as we debate these things in the future.

If I could for a few moments turn specifically to Part II which is the area of my particular expertise, the fiscal arrangements section of this bill, I note that it affects two areas, the Canada assistance plan and the Public Utilities Income Tax Transfer Act.

The Canada assistance plan changes are in clause 12 of the bill and the purpose is to limit future federal CAP contributions to each province to the amount they received in the year ending March 31, 1995 until superseded by social security program reform in fiscal 1996-97.

Our position generally has been to recognize the need for reduction in the area of federal transfers and specifically in the area of welfare. I guess what we ask is why we are imposing targets for reduction in the absence of any particular policy for change and even in the absence of any particular policy direction that would indicate what the changes would be.

In our view there have already been inequities created through this situation. The previous government brought in specific caps to the payments that went to the so-called have provinces: