

Oral Questions

Mr. Speaker, I said yesterday in my statement that I would answer that question tomorrow at noon and that I would make a statement. Not a single Canadian, not a single reporter asked that question this morning. Everyone has understood that the reply will be made tomorrow at noon, and I think that, if you make a small effort, you will understand it yourself.

• (1430)

[English]

POSSIBLE EFFECT OF RECOMMENDATIONS ON ATLANTIC REGION

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Employment and Immigration. It has to do with the Forget Commission Report. None of the briefs from the provincial Governments recommended either the elimination of the regional extended benefits or the implementation of the annualization of benefits. The impact of such measures on the economy of Atlantic Canada would be \$660 million. For example, an unemployed person in St. John's, Newfoundland, who worked 20 weeks and who is receiving \$240 under the present system, would receive \$102 if the Forget Commission Report recommendations were implemented. Because this has created some uncertainty in Atlantic Canada will the Minister take the opportunity to give an unequivocal commitment now that the elimination of regional extended benefits and annualization will not be implemented by the Government?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I have read the same report as my colleague. Sure enough, I noticed that the figures were high. However, instead of doing some sort of haphazard analysis, I think that the issue should be considered as a whole. We should try to consider that as a whole, and not take one item one after another but make a comprehensive assessment as any responsible organization would do and when taking stock of the situation, provide policies which will respect, as stated, the unemployed.

[English]

REGIONAL EXTENDED BENEFITS

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I know that trying to get a commitment from this Government is like trying to walk across an ocean full of whipped cream on snowshoes.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Some Hon. Members: Author?

Mr. Clark (Yellowhead): No originality.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Perhaps the Hon. Member might consider that with the onset of winter it will become easier.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Rodriguez: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. The Minister says that by May 15 he will give a response, which means that all of the people in the Atlantic region will have to live with another sword of Damocles over their heads waiting to know where the Government stands on something that is so important to them. I wish to give the Minister the opportunity to stand here in his place now and commit himself not to eliminate the regional extended benefits and not to put annualization into place. He will not be out of line with the provinces in Atlantic Canada if he does so.

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the Government is taking the required time, which is relatively short, to assess the proposals and has been considering during the past year and a half both a majority report and a minority report which you know about and has clearly undertaken not to lower the benefits paid to the unemployed. Once again, we are as much aware as you are of the needs in the Atlantic Provinces. The Prime Minister has undertaken, as I said, to take into account in the proposals which will be made in May the regional and economic facts of this country in which we live.

[English]

REQUEST THAT PRIME MINISTER REJECT RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister. The Minister of Transport has rejected categorically the Forget Commission Report. The Minister of Employment and Immigration does not support him. Will the Prime Minister demonstrate some real leadership with regard to the recommendations of the Forget Commission, stand in his place today and tell the working poor, working Canadians and the unemployed, that he will not accept the recommendations of the Forget Commission, thus terminating extended regional benefits, thereby costing Atlantic Canadians \$660 million in terms of their economy? Will the Prime Minister provide some real leadership with regard to a very important issue?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, if my hon. friend would look at the statement issued yesterday by the Minister he would see that it states:

The Government does not endorse the Forget report nor any other, and it will not respond directly and specifically to the Forget report recommendations.

Except, as mentioned by my hon. colleague, on May 15. That is a pretty straightforward and not unreasonable position to adopt in view of the complexity of the situation. I would think that my hon. friend would want to support the Government in this type of mature approach.