

• (1020)

Furthermore, in addition to the term employment benefits being a misnomer, they will merely replace a number of active measures that were given rather short thrift. They still exist, but with a difference. Instead of being paid out of the general tax account, benefits will now be paid out of the unemployment insurance account.

So the additional money that will be taken out of the pockets of the unemployed and businesses and workers earning less than \$39,000 will be used to pay these new employment benefits but, instead of coming out of the general account, they will come out of the unemployment insurance account.

The official opposition will do everything in its power to stop this reform.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mrs. Lalonde: Yes, Mr. Speaker, we are going through difficult economic times. And that is why people with some economic imagination ought to know where the cuts should be made. They should not be made at the expense of the average citizen who is having enough trouble surviving as it is. There are many people having trouble keeping their heads above water. Unemployment insurance is supposed to be a life preserver. However, instead of helping people to survive—I am not saying the present system is perfect—the proposed reform is based on the wrong economic premise: it is anti-employment. It will generate insecurity and poverty.

As for those described as abusing the system, one thing must be said—and this is something we learned from the economists long ago—no system can be set up without this happening, unless considerable thought is given to the way it will be used. Those who do not abuse the system will, as we say, get it in the neck.

It is not surprising this measure was not revealed before the Quebec referendum. I would add, however, that workers in the Maritimes are also hit hard. I will say one thing, and I will repeat and repeat it: the approach of this government is to cut the number of workers in the labour market where jobs are not stable. It has nothing to do with the workers and everything to do with the labour market.

Instead of looking for the economic means to transform the labour market, the government is penalizing people, particularly those people who live in the Maritimes and Quebec. Quebec is being further penalized because it has a bigger population. The announced cuts of \$640 million are added on to the \$735 million in cuts to be made this year and next.

Even taking into account the supposed existing active measures, which will, under this program, this so-called reform, now come out of the unemployment insurance account, even here there are cuts of \$400 million in addition to the \$735

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million. This means more than a billion dollars in cuts for Quebec, not to mention the billions also cut in the Atlantic provinces.

When the labour market fails to provide a job for everyone, people are not punished. What suffers is the economy and the development we are trying to work on.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, I will stop now, but I promise that, though I stop now, I will continue to talk about this reform and do everything I can to block it. It makes no sense for a country like Quebec and for a country like Canada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1025)

[English]

Mr. Maurizio Bevilacqua (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was glad to hear the hon. member conclude her remarks by saying she had a lot more to say. That was certainly my hope because I did not hear very much that was worth noting.

I have a problem understanding how a member of Parliament who was a very active member of the human resources development committee in which witnesses continually stated to us that they wanted a change to the status quo, could comment to the House of Commons that she still believes in the status quo. She still believes in the system which Canadians from coast to coast, particularly those who are unemployed, have told us is not working. It is simply unbelievable that at this stage of the debate the hon. member would not come up with any proposals that would speak to the modernization and restructuring of the Unemployment Insurance Act.

It is also quite fascinating how the member and her party have spent the past two years advocating separatism. They have advocated the notion that Quebec on its own could actually be a more functional society but for some reason or other they have not mentioned that this type of political instability has resulted in job losses in this country. They do not talk about that because they are too busy trying to pretend they are the defenders of the less fortunate in our society.

The hon. member also does not talk about the 100,000 jobs that will be created as a result of the employment insurance changes the Minister of Human Resources Development tabled last Friday. She does not talk about that because it is good news. She cannot relate to positive change in people's lives.

There are also some things she omits, such as the family income supplement where people with dependents will be able to earn up to 80 per cent of average earnings. She does not talk about that because it speaks to helping people. It speaks to giving greater income security for people while at the same time providing them with the tools required to find work.