

Government Orders

dwindling. Those amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act will not keep the young in the regions. On the contrary, they will leave sooner for the city. The shorter the benefits, the faster they will go in order to find a job. They will try to find a job rather than depend on social welfare, and they will head for the city to do so. The problem is they will not find more jobs in the city than they do at home. And they will end up on welfare. The Minister of Finance will be pleased because they will no longer appear in federal statistics but on provincial social welfare rolls. If that was his goal, he did succeed.

Let me give a few figures on the impact of unemployment insurance reform. Eastern Canada and Quebec will be hit particularly hard by the elimination of regional rates of unemployment beyond 13 per cent. The last word I got from UI officials is that the current rate in my riding of Berthier—Montcalm is about 15 per cent. Those amendments will have a severe impact in my area.

When the regional unemployment rate is higher than 13 per cent, the number of weeks of benefits for people having just a few weeks of insurable work will be greatly affected. The impact on Eastern Quebec, where the needs are most acute, will be severe. According to an internal document of the Department of Human Resources Development, we can expect the following reductions in benefits: Atlantic Canada, \$630 million; Quebec, \$735 million; Ontario, \$560 million; western Canada, \$430 million.

The Minister of Finance argued that the cuts were fair, saying that Quebec and the Maritime provinces would still get more, per capita, after the reform. If he meant the benefit to population ratio, his argument does not hold water. It is natural for a province with a high unemployment rate to get more than other provinces.

• (1555)

Since I only have one minute left, I will raise another issue which is very dear to me. As you know, 1994 is the International Year of the Family. I think this should be a golden opportunity for the government to do something to help families.

Let me read you an excerpt of a letter I received from one of my constituents. The subject is "The art of being stupid in the extreme". That person wrote: "You know when the new federal policy regarding help to families was released, I was pleased to see that children's benefits were no longer taxable. Unfortunately, the government announced at the same time that my husband and I were too rich to continue receiving such benefits". With an annual salary of \$38,000, once daycare and babysitting costs are paid, as well as other expenses, there is only \$11,000 left for the year and for the pension fund. Yet, the minister said that these

people were too rich and sent them a notice of assessment for a \$63 overpayment.

"I have a cute little case containing exactly \$46.09 in pennies and nickels from my little girl's piggy bank. I want to send it to the Minister". The person who wrote asked me to table it in the House, but since this is not possible, I will send it directly to the minister. This is a good example of the lack of policy and will to help families raise children.

Mr. Bernard St-Laurent (Manicouagan): Madam Speaker, Manicouagan, the riding that I represent, is one of the regions most affected by the lack of jobs. Its geography is quite particular. It is so special that to meet all my constituents in the towns and villages where they live, I must often use four different modes of transport—plane, boat, car, of course, and often snowmobile.

Unemployment is particularly high because of the demographics of the constituency. The latest unemployment rate recorded by Statistics Canada, for March, I believe, was 17.8 per cent in my region, compared to 10.6 per cent nationally.

The eastern part of the riding is quite specific, made up mainly of fishermen and/or people who depend on that natural resource; unemployment insurance is a considerable source of income for them. Between 80 and 85 per cent of the people east of Natashquan depend directly on income from fishing. Now it seems that the measures in Bill C-17 will especially affect eastern Canada, including Quebec, and particularly eastern Quebec, including my riding.

That is why I strongly denounce Bill C-17, especially clause 28. This clause will be disastrous for those, like many of my constituents, who depend on fishing.

This is what might happen if Bill C-17 is implemented. For one thing, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is reducing fishing in the Gulf of St. Lawrence so that the stocks can recover. That is most commendable and useful too, up to a point. But at the same time, and there is the rub, Bill C-17 will raise the minimum number of weeks of work required from 10 to 12.

So on the one hand people are prevented from accumulating weeks of work and on the other, the number required is increased from 10 to 12. These two measures pull in opposite directions instead of converging.

In March, after the Minister of Finance presented the federal budget, three teachers in the Department of Economics at the Université du Québec à Montréal, UQAM, openly described what they thought of this in the provincial media. They expressed surprise and concern at learning that nearly 60 per cent of the announced federal deficit reduction, namely \$2.4 billion out of \$4.1 billion, will be supported by unemployed Canadians. Their statement speaks volumes.