

*Government Orders*

\$135 million on social assistance. Benefits paid to Quebec's unemployed in 1994-95 will be cut by a total of \$735 million.

Meanwhile, the Minister of Finance still claims to promote job creation. How can he indulge such fantasies when he is about to take more money out of the pockets of a large group of consumers in this country, the unemployed?

Although it makes no sense at all, the Liberal government continues to apply the same policy as the Conservatives, in other words, it prefers to attack the unemployed instead of creating jobs. So far, the present and previous governments' mindless cuts in unemployment insurance have produced very unsatisfactory results. In 1989, 1 million Canadians were unemployed. In 1993, there were 1.6 million, an increase of 60 per cent.

On the subject of job creation, I think we must realize it will take more than a good old fashioned infrastructures program to improve the employment situation. Although this program invests federal funds, it also involves additional expenditures by the provinces and municipalities. In most cases, this money will have to be borrowed, which means additional debt.

In this scenario, I think reducing the number of insurable weeks will have no effect at all. In fact, this reduction will come down harder on regions and provinces where the unemployment rate is high, in other words, Quebec and the Maritime provinces. This measure will affect six regions out of thirteen in Quebec and seven out of thirteen in the Maritimes. The proposed amendments will not only affect whole regions, they will also have a devastating effect on the most vulnerable people in this group, and I am referring to claimants who work only for short periods. Unfortunately, the majority of workers in this category are young people.

In Quebec, youth unemployment is around 20 per cent, involving about 137,000 unemployed in this age group. The real problem, in their case and in the case of other labour market "rejects" is not that they have no incentive to work because unemployment benefits are too generous, but that there are no jobs available.

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Here we have a perfect example of a government saying one thing and doing another. On the one hand, we have the government stating in its official discourse that the gap between the poor and the rich must be bridged and, on the other hand, implementing measures which shamelessly make the less fortunate bear the brunt of the federal deficit.

It is more obvious than ever today that this ship is sinking. Constant infringement upon provincial jurisdictions, particularly with respect to job training, has led the federal system to the brink of bankruptcy. And now the supporters of this system want the most vulnerable segment of our society to bear the brunt of a

misguided policy of infringement, which prompts more and more Quebecers to say it may be high time we get out of that system.

It has become nothing more than a vast and expensive smoke screen for the financial abyss the Liberal government is leading us to. Much would need to be done in terms of administrative management and even about the way ministers carry out their duties.

As reported last Saturday in *Le Soleil*, following the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs' example, the Minister of Human Resources Development also used a government jet, at a cost estimated, using the Auditor General's method of calculation, at \$117,900, to go and talk about cuts in compensation to fishermen in Quebec and the Maritimes.

The minister has a lot of nerve to try to make the people of Quebec and Canada believe that they are going to be consulted concerning social programs reform. This is the kind of consultation I do not hesitate to call a sham because the minister did not even wait for the report to be tabled, which it was today, to start making cuts in the unemployment insurance system.

As we speak, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development is releasing its report on the first phase of the consultations it has held on social programs. But by proposing, as it did, the adoption of Bill C-17, which deals mainly with cuts to the unemployment insurance system, that is to say one of the most important elements of our social programs, the government is actually going ahead and making cuts in that area without even waiting for the report from its own committee. What message is it looking to send to the public for the second phase of the consultation process?

The minister did not wait either for the rapport of a study group which held similar consultations in all provinces at the same time as the committee. I myself attended last Tuesday in Montreal a meeting organized for community organizations by the coalition of organizations for the development of employability, acting under a mandate only three weeks old.

Most of the organizations said that the time is too short; they did not have time to prepare, but were coming anyway; they have experiences to share; they will tell you what they think of it; employment should be the priority; maintain the level of social programs. But we did not expect this: the government consults but meanwhile takes measures attacking the most disadvantaged.

The second phase of consultations is approaching. I am a member of the human resources committee; the report is to come out in September. I think that it would have been wise under the circumstances—with a less improvised, less rushed consultation, with more serious briefs presented, further to the