

Oral Questions

Another complaint that has come from some of the provinces is to the effect that while people are waiting for their UI benefits, they are coming in for welfare payments. We have indicated that we are prepared to enter into agreements with the provinces so that this can be taken care of in the form of a charge against the unemployment insurance payments that they would eventually receive. It is a slight exaggeration by the hon. Leader of the NDP when he quotes the statistics in that particular way.

Mr. Broadbent: Mr. Speaker, I wish the minister would listen to the question instead of giving us the answer which has been prepared for him by his officials. I gave the minister no statistics in my question other than the one that has come out of his own department, that the saving through the UIC changes amounts to \$135 million. That is the only precise figure I gave the minister.

I would ask him, because we from Ontario now know from a newspaper report and on the basis of our own checking with some of the provinces involved—for example, in the province of New Brunswick the situation has deteriorated even more than it has in the province of Ontario—if he would commit the government to fully reimbursing the provinces so that the burden of this unemployment is not put on the property tax base which so badly and unfairly affects the average home owner.

● (1427)

Mr. Cullen: Mr. Speaker, here again the hon. member says he uses one statistic, but he uses it in a very political and simplistic way, ignoring all the benefits that have been derived. There is, for example, the developmental use of unemployment insurance funds where we put that money into work-sharing. Incidentally, his party voted against that measure. Hundreds of people would not be working today if we had passed the amendments moved by his party.

We have moved to the economic growth component factor of the unemployment insurance program to see if we can create more permanent jobs rather than temporary jobs or band-aid measures, as the hon. member's party sometimes calls these programs. I think we have made good use of any savings from unemployment insurance. It was not so much a question of saving money but, rather, redirecting it through different channels so that it would be more, not less, beneficial to the unemployed.

To suggest that there is a \$135 million cut and that it should be given to the provinces is a simplistic use of the statistics which were obviously prepared by his people.

Mr. Broadbent: A final supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The minister suggested that the government has used funds to create jobs and make certain changes in retraining programs for the unemployed. No one disputes that. No one says that ought not to have been done. The point is that, particularly in the have-not provinces which all just a week ago experienced major increases in unemployment levels, they are still stuck with an immense burden.

[Mr. Cullen.]

If the additional funds they have lost are compared with what the minister says they are gaining by the new changes, they are still in a deficit position. I repeat a variant of the question. Is the minister now saying that the federal government will do nothing more to ease the burden of unemployment, particularly in the regionally deprived provinces?

Mr. Cullen: No, Mr. Speaker, I am not saying that. I am suggesting that millions of dollars have been made available for direct job creation and for training through the developmental use of these funds. We are now negotiating with the four Atlantic provinces to deal with a reforestation project they have to cope with, the spruce budworm disease. We think this is a better use of the money. If any money is being saved from unemployment insurance, it will be put into areas where it is really needed. That is precisely what we have been doing with the money.

[Translation]

SUGGESTED BENEFITS FOR PERSONS 65 AND OVER—
GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Eudore Allard (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Employment and Immigration. Considering that the validity of the UIC decision concerning the refusal to give unemployment insurance benefits to persons aged 65 or more has never been fully established, considering that this decision is therefore contrary to Bill C-52, can the minister tell the House whether he intends to comply with the requests of those 18,000 retired persons which are getting increasingly urgent in view of the rising cost of living and of the alarmingly low purchasing power of that category of citizens?

[English]

Hon. Bud Cullen (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, at the urging and on the representations of my colleague, the hon. member for Montmorency, I looked into this particular situation. With passage of the bill which removed benefits in respect of persons 65 years of age and over, and as a result of a court decision, we took several actions to help people caught up in that particular situation. We were very generous in the application of the law. We did everything we could in a humanitarian way to accommodate the people caught at this time. But I do not foresee changing the bill back.

* * *

ESTIMATES

ITEMS RESPECTING INDIAN RESERVES

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I raised a question with the President of the Treasury Board with respect to the very severe hardship being created for native groups across the country as a result of expenditure cutbacks by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern