

● (1425)

[English]

REGIONAL EXTENDED BENEFITS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the same Minister. As the Minister well knows, the Forget Commission in its complete heartlessness recommends cutting out some \$3 billion of revenue going to those parts of Canada which are already most adversely affected by high unemployment, resource communities right across the country, in the main. Will the Minister now guarantee that the Government will not accept the recommendation of abolishing regional extended benefits provided by the Unemployment Insurance Commission? Will he show a little compassion if Forget did not?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I think I have already told the Leader of the New Democratic Party, or that I have repeated what the Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance said. They said: There is no question of reducing federal Government contributions to the unemployment fund. So there is absolutely no justification for resorting to scare tactics. Let me make this quite clear from the outset: The Government has no intention to overhaul the unemployment insurance system to the detriment of workers.

[English]

REQUEST FOR GOVERNMENT DECISION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, the Minister has said in the House, and outside, that the Government is going to wait until next May to make a decision. Since the Commission cost \$5 million, has been working for 18 months, had 475 briefs submitted to it plus an additional 1,500 written briefs, could the Minister tell us why we need more time to study this? Was the Government not elected to make a decision? Has it not heard? Why will it not make a decision now?

[Translation]

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, if a commission asked hundreds of Canadians to appear—I will use your argument. If a commission spent \$5 million and travelled throughout the country to listen to Canadians, will the Government respond in half a day?

FUTURE OF POOR REGIONS

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): That is the point of the original debate. There is no need to study the matter for another few months. The Government is fully aware of the situation in the Atlantic Provinces and in Quebec, and one thing is clear: benefits must not be reduced in these regions. That is clear. Now my question to the Minister is this: Will he

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now guarantee that regional benefits will be maintained in these poor regions?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I represent a region where unemployment benefits are very important. One thing I can guarantee my colleague is that there is no way this Government . . . Unlike our friends opposite we had the courage to set up a commission of inquiry on a controversial issue, and all commentators say it took political courage to do it. And so we did. Yesterday I even set the date, the first time a Government does this. I will unveil the Government's proposals on May 15, and I am sure that Canadians are not afraid. We have the courage to say we will state our position, and we are not afraid that our recommendations might not be in their best interests.

SITUATION OF EARLY RETIREES

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister. Mr. Prime Minister, I know that you do not want to reply to the question dealing with senior citizens. It is quite obvious. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, and now the Minister of Employment and Immigration have said that the purpose of improving the Unemployment Insurance Plan is not to reduce federal contributions to unemployed Canadians. If what the Prime Minister says is true, will he tell us now, in view of this statement, that the Government has no choice but to reimburse the 50,000 workers who took early retirement and who lost their unemployment benefits?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I thought that the Hon. Member was a reasonable man. I told him yesterday that I would reply to this question tomorrow at noon. There is no need to try and give the impression that you are going to force us to give you some answers. It has nothing to do with you. I am the one who shall give the answer, and it will come from this Government.

GOVERNMENT POSITION

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, we have just discovered a new Charlie Brown. The Minister and Prime Minister have had the gall to say that the purpose of the review is not to reduce contributions. They cut off the benefits of these poor retirees one year ago, and they now want these people to believe them.

Can the Minister tell us why, after misleading the senior citizens and the sick, his government should have the confidence of the unemployed today since they were misled about consultation on the Blue Paper? We want frank and clear answers.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I said in my statement yesterday . . . Mr. Speaker, I shall not attempt to speak at the same time as the Hon. Member for Hamilton East. It would be impossible.