

Supply

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I was much interested in what the member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine said about the relevance of changing the system based on a number of weeks to one based on a number of hours.

He gave us the example of people who will probably benefit from this. However, the problem with this reform does not necessarily lie in the fact that the number of hours is changed.

Saying that someone will have to work 910 hours to qualify for UI benefits for the first time means that young people, those who re-enter the labour force and women who left it several years ago or worked at home will now have to work 26 weeks, 35 hours a week, to get UI benefits. The eligibility period has almost doubled.

There are aspects of the reform which are unacceptable and I hope the government will correct them. I will give another example which concerns the ridings of Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine and Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup. I am talking about the fact that, under the new system, seasonal workers will lose part of their benefits. After three years, people who claim for UI benefits every year, such as workers in the tourist or fishing industry, will see their benefits reduced from 55 per cent to 50 per cent of their weekly insurable earnings. They are going to be penalized because they work in seasonal industries.

Now that the reform has been tabled, would it not be possible for the government to bring forward amendments to correct these things which will have a devastating effect on regions such as eastern Quebec?

My question to the member is this: What does he think about the fact that our young people might have to move out of our regions because of the increase in the number of hours it takes to be eligible for unemployment insurance?

Will the requirement to work 910 hours, which is the equivalent of 26 weeks at 35 hours a week, result in our young people leaving the regions in greater numbers?

I have another question that I want to ask of the member, reminding him that, yesterday, the National Assembly of Quebec also endorsed the current position of the government of that province by a 96 to 0 vote. It was a unanimous decision.

• (1315)

I would like to ask him if he would be willing to table in the House a motion which would read as follows: "Quebec must have sole responsibility for policies pertaining to manpower adjustment and occupational training within its borders and patriate accordingly the funding allocated by the federal government to these programs in Quebec". Would he be willing to table such a motion, which was adopted unanimously by the

only Parliament representing Quebecers only, in order to settle the issue of manpower once and for all? Would he be prepared to ask the federal parliament to adopt such an approach?

Mr. Gagnon: Mr. Speaker, there are many questions I would like to answer.

First of all, we clearly show our confidence in Quebecers and in all other Canadians. I think that by giving each unemployed worker a certain amount of money, we give them the tools needed to create their own jobs by letting them decide which course best meets their needs. They can choose the courses suited to the new economy that is emerging in each region.

Decentralization directly involves these people, Quebecers. That is decentralization, and that is what the unemployed want. That is what we mean by change: giving people the appropriate programs, based on their own personal needs.

I also want to answer my colleague's second question, about young people fresh out of high school, professional training, college or university, that is to say all young people. When I graduated—and that was not too long ago—my first priority was to find a job. I would rather use examples from my own region. When a young person graduates, he or she seeks a job to gain experience, to show what he or she can do. This is why with the new in particular, programs like services Canada and youth internship, in particular, we will tell the young person this: "Listen, you have this much money, go to your employer and tell him that, with the support of the Canadian government, you can subsidize part of your salary, on the condition that he promises to keep you on staff for a certain period of time".

I think we are investing in Quebecers. For too long, we invested in the public service, in obsolete programs or programs that were not tailored to meet the real needs of the people. We listen to the people and to the unemployed but, unfortunately, this is not the case of the opposition.

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has spent a lot of time defending the government's unemployment scheme. There would not be any need for this debate if he would answer one simple question. Why does the government not return this program to its original mandate of being an insurance program, as it was in 1940 when it was started?

Liberal members defend this by saying that history says they are supposed to do all this and be involved in this area. That is not true. The original intent of this was to be a true insurance program. The government has strayed from this, which is why the Bloc is asking these questions. That is why the Bloc has these concerns. That is why many provinces have these concerns.