

Government Orders

catch fish. It is not a very flattering comparison for the thousands of Canadians who are without work”.

This minister was a Liberal opposition member last year and I could quote many more who spoke out then against the Conservative government's desire to amend the Unemployment Insurance Act. It seemed to be the apple of his eye. What has happened? What is going on? That was a year ago. As far as I know, there was no indication in the red book that the government would be cutting UI. On the contrary, I heard hon. members and now government ministers repeat dozens of times to anyone willing to listen that they certainly would not cut social programs.

And what are they doing now? Even before completing his consultation for a social program reform, as soon as the budget is passed, the minister will cut \$1.3 billion from the UI. What happened to the minister during the year? He has some experience, having served as minister of employment in a previous Liberal government. He was familiar with the job. He cannot be blamed for improvising a position just like that.

If it were only one minister, I would keep quiet, but I made a brief search, and here is a question asked by the current Prime Minister. At the time, he said the following: “Mr. Speaker, I would like to know if the Conservative Prime Minister thinks that the approach used by the minister, which is to call all opponents of the bill separatists, is unacceptable to the people in Canada. Hundreds of thousands of Canadians throughout the country feel that some measures in that bill”, referring to Bill C-113, “are totally unacceptable”.

• (1525)

What happened a year later? The Prime Minister, who was then in opposition, now leads a government which, far from reversing the trend to cut UI, is reinforcing it. What happened? One has to wonder.

I could quote other MPs, but people sometimes say: “Ah, these Bloc Quebecois members and their opinions”. So, instead I will quote the opinion of journalists published in *La Presse*, last April 15, in an article under the following headline: “819,000 people will go on welfare and 44,000 will become ineligible for UI benefits following amendments proposed in Bill C-17”. The article referred to July 3. This is important, because people are not always aware of that date. Some are, because they were affected by measures which came into effect on April 3, but those who will only be affected on July 3 have not noticed the change, because that change is yet to come.

The article went on to say: “According to the February 22 budget, as of July 3, people will need 12 weeks of insurable employment, instead of ten, to be eligible for UI benefits. It is

estimated that 44,000 recipients will not be able to meet this requirement in 1994-95”.

The article then dealt with another measure, this one in effect since April 3. It stated: “The duration of benefits is reduced according to the regional unemployment rate. In some regions, it will only be 35 weeks”. In the good old days, back in 1989, that period could last up to 52 weeks. This is a major change. The article continued: “Together, these changes will result in 19,000 new welfare cases across Canada”, for a mere two extra weeks of insurable employment. In total, as I said earlier, 819,000 people will have to go on welfare. What does that mean?

It means that people will lose UI benefits sooner, but will still be without a job. This will result in additional costs to provincial governments. Even though the federal government finances half of the costs of social assistance, it is leaving the bill to provinces.

In the case of an amount of \$1.3 billion, this transfer represents a sum estimated at \$735 million per year by economists from the Université du Québec à Montréal. That is a lot of money. Seven hundred and thirty five million dollars per year. This means, of course, that the federal government is amending the Unemployment Insurance Act to save money, but more than half of those savings, 60 per cent to be precise, are made by transferring this expenditure to the provinces. I wonder how people would react if a person unable to pay off his debts simply changed address and left his neighbour stuck with the bills. Nobody would put up with that. Yet, when the provinces complain about that situation, what does the federal government tell them? It tells them that it is a whim of theirs.

• (1530)

But \$735 million is a significant amount of money. In the end, there is only one taxpayer. The men and women who look into this situation must find this total lack of foresight from the government absolutely incredible.

If there were, at least, some jobs available, but unemployment is high. With 1,000,622 jobless people in April, and 467,000 Quebecers out of work, what we need is jobs.

But what do these people get as an answer? That there are no jobs available, because it is not true that the infrastructure program will create enough jobs to put all of these people back to work. In conclusion, I know we are an hour and a half away from the passing of this bill, but I would once again ask members of the previous Parliament to refer to their notes and recall what was their former position about cuts to unemployment insurance. I urge them to maintain their previous position, to come back to their old policy and to let the underprivileged benefit from the current situation until the government has the guts to deal with the issue of family trusts.