

Government Orders

Second, we are opposed to some of the measures that are contained in the bill and we are concerned that the reforms do not go far enough. They could be extended and be better for Canadians.

On that basis, and I summarize this for my colleagues in the Reform Party, it is our intent to vote nay on this second reading of the bill.

• (1320)

[Translation]

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies): Madam Speaker, during the two-week Easter break, I am sure many members, particularly those representing eastern regions, have had the opportunity to find out what their constituents and Canadians in general think about the conclusions and consequences of the last budget.

In my riding, right in the middle of income tax time, people called by the dozen to complain and say how mad they were about the government digging again into their pockets to take more than what was planned. With the implementation of the new regulations on unemployment insurance, ordinary workers will again be the ones to foot the bill for the cuts imposed by the budget.

Before the election, the Prime Minister said to people in his riding that he was still the "little guy from Shawinigan" and promised, in clear enough words as we all heard on TV, a shower of contracts that would create jobs in his region where the rate of unemployment is quite disastrous. A few weeks only after his election, he strikes; he goes after all the unemployed in his riding. We should not be surprised that the Prime Minister of Canada has to be surrounded by bodyguards when he visits his riding.

Madam Speaker, I represent a riding in east-end Montreal, Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies. This district has been suffering the ill effects of the recession for longer than the rest of Canada. As far back as 1987, the government recognized the very serious case of chronic unemployment in that riding. That is why I want to talk about Bill C-17 today.

According to the document tabled by the Minister of Human Resources Development at the time of the budget, and I quote: "The proposed changes to the UI program are designed to promote job creation, adequacy and fairness". The minister is therefore telling us that the fundamental reasons for changing the unemployment insurance program are adequacy and fairness. We will see that it is not so. When you look at the bill before us, you realize that the Liberals have simply dug up a bill that was being prepared by the Conservatives, as others have already pointed out.

As three researchers at the Université du Québec à Montréal said in a study on the federal budget and the unemployed: "The federal budget of February 22 forecasts a net reduction in the

deficit of \$8 billion for 1995-96" but they say that only half of that, about \$4.1 billion, will come from new measures announced by Finance Minister Martin. The other half comes from a continuation of the measures announced in the Mazankowski budget. Since Canadians and Quebecers have chosen to get rid of all but two of the members of the former government, one can safely assume that they were not exactly pleased with these ineffective measures to create jobs.

As a matter of fact, in the study we just mentioned, the UQAM researchers dealt at some length with the inefficiency of these measures. They had this to say: "We fear that reducing the length of the benefit period will be quite ineffective and will not bring about the desired results, namely, as to Mr. Axworthy himself said, to oblige recipients to work for a longer period of time in order to qualify for benefits for the same number of weeks. Current research does not allow us to draw conclusions on how the length of the benefit period affects job tenure and the length of unemployment in Canada". They conclude on this note: "It certainly does not support the minister's position".

And yet, the Minister of Human Resources Development had at his disposal the tools necessary to evaluate the inefficiency of the measures he was about to propose since, as early as the fall of 1993, the National Council of Welfare—a body created in 1969 by the Liberal government of the time—said the following in its report: "Changes to unemployment insurance which would exclude certain workers could lead to an increase in welfare rolls."

• (1325)

Ironically, this would add to the financial burden of the federal and provincial governments, which are already worried about their huge deficits. That is what we see happening in fact, although unemployment is supposed to have gone down a few points, in Quebec or the Maritimes or elsewhere.

What is actually happening is that people are leaving unemployment insurance to go on welfare. There is no employment recovery, then; that is nonsense. The authors of this report continue: "Before thinking of reducing unemployment insurance further, governments should do more research on the connections between unemployment insurance and social assistance." We can reasonably believe that, if the measures concerning unemployment insurance contained in this bill are adopted, any resulting decrease in the number of unemployed people will just add to the number on welfare.

The government, for its part, estimates that the impact on provincial welfare programs will total \$65 to \$135 million. The study that we are quoting today speaks of \$1 billion, of which \$280 million would be borne by Quebec. As we clearly see, this government is just passing its deficit on to the provinces again. Meanwhile, our pseudo-premier of Quebec says nothing about it, but the voters are not fools. They well know that when the federal government transfers its deficit to the provinces, wheth-