

Oral Questions

Already we have witnessed the disruption to the community of Port Mouton as a result of the closure by Clearwater of its fish processing plant there. Now the president of National Sea Products is warning of further lay-offs and plant closings.

Does the Government have a comprehensive plan to assist the unemployed in these communities? If so, will he tell the House what measures his Government will put in place to ensure that these communities do not follow the fate of Summerside?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, the only information we have to date is what I suppose one could call a warning by the president of National Sea Products Limited that they have excess plant capacity, that markets have not been the best, the number of fish plants has increased in Nova Scotia and the cod stocks have gone down. He has not yet made any announcement of closures of any fish plants. However, if he does, then all the normal government programs will go into effect. The National Employment Service, the unemployment insurance programs, other adjustment programs will go into effect as they have in the past and as they will in the future.

FISH PLANT WORKERS—EFFECT OF NEW
UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REGULATIONS

Mr. Francis G. LeBlanc (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Mr. Speaker, the proposed changes to the unemployment insurance program that were recently announced will mean that the unemployed fish plant workers throughout Atlantic Canada will need significantly more weeks to qualify for fewer weeks of benefits after having paid more in unemployment insurance premiums so that the Government can get out of contributing anything to the unemployment insurance program at all. This is at precisely the same time as unemployment rates are rising and major quota reductions are pointing to less work for these workers.

Will the Minister explain the fairness in that? Where is the justice in this so-called labour force development strategy?

Hon. John C. Crosbie (Minister for International Trade): Mr. Speaker, as a result of the vastly improved employment record of the last three or four years, the Government's contribution to the unemployment insurance fund has been less and less necessary because the deficit no longer existed. The forecast for unemployment

in the area shows a slight increase over last year, but still a great improvement over the record of the Government that came before us. I do not believe that the dire forecast of the hon. gentleman will prove to be accurate.

THE BUDGET

EFFECT OF CUT-BACKS

Mr. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, we have been witnessing today, as we have over the course of the last month, a Government telling us one thing and proceeding to do something else.

In the absence of the Minister of Employment and Immigration, my question is directed to the Minister of Finance. As an example of saying one thing and doing another, I draw the attention of the Minister to the fact that the Government has removed \$800 million from the unemployment insurance fund to supplement the Government's past cuts in training programs. It has restricted eligibility for benefits—

Some Hon. Members: Question!

Mr. Volpe: It has reduced the benefit period. In the interim this Budget proposes an additional cut of \$2.9 billion in regional extended benefits. With the unemployment rate in the upswing—

Some Hon. Members: Question!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Would the Hon. Member please put his question.

• (1150)

Mr. Volpe: Mr. Speaker, with the unemployment rate on the upswing in eight of ten provinces, will the Government tell Canadians that the Government does not intend to abandon its responsibilities in employment programs?

Hon. Jean J. Charest (Minister of State (Youth) and Minister of State (Fitness and Amateur Sport): Mr. Speaker, I do not know where the Hon. Member has been since the House was reopened.

It seems to me that the Minister of Employment and Immigration announced a revamping of the Unemployment Insurance Act so that we could invest more money—much needed money—into training and retraining, while maintaining at the same time the level of commitment that we have had for the Canadian Jobs Strategy that now stands at approximately over \$1.7 billion.