

*Government Orders*

I want to remind the House and my own party that in the two previous parliaments we savagely attacked the Conservative government for the amendments it made to the unemployment insurance system, amendments that made it more difficult to qualify and amendments that reduced the benefits. In a previous set of amendments, it increased the penalty for those who quit or were fired without cause, as defined in the act, up to about 11 or 12 weeks. This was quite a considerable increase in the penalty.

In the last round of amendments in 1993 the Conservative government took away all benefits from people who had quit their jobs for serious reasons but could not meet the definition of just cause in the act. It was the same with those who were fired, according to the bosses for just cause, but which was very often in the mind of the employee not a just cause. It was simply a case of harassment or trying to get rid of those people with trumped up charges against them.

We questioned the minister at that time. We said: "Well you just amended the act a couple of years ago to increase the penalties from six weeks to twelve weeks"—or whatever it was—"and now you are completely eliminating any benefits at all. You are going to a very extreme penalty without ever really testing the penalties that you put into place a few years ago".

We attacked those sorts of things. We attacked the government for totally removing the \$2.8 billion that the government used to contribute to the unemployment insurance fund. Prior to those amendments in the last Parliament, the Government of Canada always contributed to the fund after the unemployment rate went over a certain level. The other contributions to the fund came from workers and from employers. It was a three way contribution: the employers, the employees and the Government of Canada. The Government of Canada then withdrew its contribution of \$2.8 billion and put the entire burden on workers and employers. The rates went up. They were another form of taxation. We were very critical of that. We said that was not the way to do it.

• (1020)

What happened is by doing these things to the unemployment insurance system, by cutting back the benefits, by making it more difficult to qualify, by throwing people out of work without any benefits whatsoever in some cases, it simply shifted the burden to take care of those people to the provinces and to the municipalities. When people do not have work and they cannot find work someone has to support them. We are not living in a cruel, inhumane society. We do not let people starve to death. What happened was the provincial social security systems had to pick up those people and take care of them. In Ontario and Nova Scotia the cities had to and they could not afford it. It was simply a shifting of the burden.

I am trying to remind the House and my party that I fully support this re-examination of social security. However, I am also reminding them that we have to be very careful in not overdoing it to the extent that we are cruel, inhumane, insensitive, unfair and unjust.

Let us study, let us recommend, let us save money if we can through a better delivery system, let us eliminate duplication. Let us not take benefits away from those who worked for years and years, built this country and contributed to funds, such as the old age security fund. Let us not take benefits away from those who worked and contributed to unemployment insurance. Let us not make our workers slaves of their bosses.

Let us be consistent, I say to my own party, with what we said in opposition. Let us be consistent with what we said in the campaign. Let us be credible. Let us be fair, just and compassionate in this country.

[Translation]

**Mr. Nic Leblanc (Longueuil):** Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, an excellent speech by a 28-year veteran of this House who is very experienced in parliamentary matters and also very knowledgeable about Quebec, since he comes from Quebec.

However, there is something that surprises me. I have been a member of Parliament for nine and a half years, and from time to time people have come to my office with serious problems caused by inconsistencies—we have mentioned this before—in the area of manpower and training programs. In fact the situation is far worse than we think.

I would like to mention one example I think is absolutely inhumane. Some people who were on unemployment insurance after losing their jobs were taking courses funded by the federal government. These people, who were between the ages of 30 and 45, had decided to finish their fourth and fifth year of high school in order to graduate. They were in fact encouraged to do their third, fourth or fifth year. Unfortunately the unemployment insurance regulations are inconsistent with the rules of the Quebec school commission. For instance, these people had to take classes during the summer to finish their course. The Unemployment Insurance Commission told them they could not stop working or stop taking courses for more than two weeks.

As everybody knows, in Quebec, because of the unions and the government, teachers have to stop for a month during the summer, which meant the courses were automatically cancelled. Most of these people had almost finished their courses but they could not continue because Quebec's regulations were not consistent with Ottawa's. As a result, these people who had