

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Beauport—Montmorency—Orléans): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, March 25, my colleague, the hon. member for Mercier, addressed this House on Bill C-17. She asked members to adopt the following amendment: "That this House refuse to proceed with the second reading of Bill C-17, an Act to amend certain statutes to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in Parliament on February 22, 1994; 1) given that the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act do not reduce the inequities between have and have-not regions in the country and contain no specific measures to reduce youth unemployment; 2) given that the amendments to the Unemployment Insurance Act do not cancel the increase in premiums paid by workers and employers in effect since January 1, 1994."

• (1650)

Today is the period allocated to ask the House to adopt this amendment. The reasons that led my colleague to present her amendment are increasingly relevant, and the population, particularly in Eastern Canada, clearly supports our demands. It is unacceptable to ask Atlantic and Quebec recipients to become scapegoats so that the current government can satisfy its appetite for rationalization in unemployment insurance as impartially as it does in this bill.

As my colleague from Mercier clearly stated in this House, we cannot ask Atlantic Canadians, who account for 8.5 per cent of the Canadian population, to accept cuts of 26 per cent of the unemployment insurance budget. We have the same problem in Quebec, where 25 per cent of the Canadian population will be hit by cuts of 31 per cent.

Quebec has known for a long time that the Liberal Party of Canada was going to impose such economic losses on Quebec if it came to power. It knew that the Liberal government would present bills allowing it to save \$5.5 billion over three years and that the bill would be split inequitably among the provinces. In the proposals contained in Bill C-17, Quebec and the Maritimes end up with a large portion of the bill while western Canada and Ontario are much less affected.

Quebec knew that one of the first measures taken by the Liberal government would be to approve an increase of 7 cents in unemployment insurance premium rates, which it did on January 1, 1994, nine weeks after being elected. Quebec knew that this increase would eliminate 9,000 jobs. And to look good, this same government proposes to re-create these same 9,000 jobs in 1995 and 1996 by bringing premiums down to their 1993 levels.

The government gives with one hand what it took with the other and expects to be taken seriously. Quebecers were not fooled. They elected 54 members of the Bloc Québécois to defend their interests, and that is what we intend to do here until Quebec becomes a separate country, and we demand that the

redistribution of wealth, whether through unemployment insurance or any other social benefit, be fair until Quebecers hold all the levers of economic control and are masters in their own country, Quebec.

If Bill C-17 extends for two years the freeze on compensation for federally appointed judges, Parliamentary agents, the Governor General, the Lieutenant Governors and parliamentarians, fine, but it is not all right if it raises the premiums of workers whose buying power is already lower and the premiums of companies that already have trouble competing in a world of global markets; that is unacceptable.

However, the Minister of Finance had the opportunity on February 22 to present a budget for a fair redistribution of wealth by taxing the richest individuals and sparing the poorest. That is not what the Minister of Finance did. He presented a budget in which he projected a deficit of \$39.7 billion for 1994-95, when the total debt has already exceeded \$500 billion.

On March 7, I asked this House to fight the deficit and waste. I suggested to this House some ways to create permanent jobs and to improve Canada's finances. Today I would like to add some ways to reduce the deficit, improve our economy and make our people more secure, while redistributing our wealth fairly and equitably.

• (1655)

Let us look at water transportation. In his budget speech, the finance minister mentions the upgrading of ground transportation but fails to specify how it will be done.

Well before the advent of rail and air transportation or trucking, waterways were used by the early settlers. Canada goes from sea to sea and holds the largest bodies of fresh water in the world. A majestic river flows through it. Canadian harbours played a critical role in the development of Canada and Quebec. However, in recent years, the majority of ports have been experiencing serious problems.

And yet, waterways provide the most economical and the least polluting means of transportation. Our merchant marine has been all but abandoned and our shipyards are facing great difficulties, especially in Quebec. It is not a question of building ships just for the sake of it; indeed, we can and must build ships to lower transportation costs and preserve the environment we live in.

The development of Quebec City's harbour and most ports along the St. Lawrence Seaway is based mainly on grain transportation. Whereas western ports see their share of grain shipments increased, St. Lawrence Seaway harbours are nearly at a standstill. The problem is compounded by a drop in Russia's grain purchases due to an excellent wheat crop in that country. What are we to do in such a situation? We must find another vocation for our majestic river and our fresh water bodies. For example, cruises are an ever-expanding sector both in the