

Mr. Gagliano: The hon. member says he is covered. How? It is easy to say he is covered. An employee gets a phone call from his wife, who says: Listen, you have to come home because we have some problems here. When the employee decides to go home, the employer says: No, you are going to stay here, and if don't, you won't be entitled to unemployment insurance benefits. This situation is not covered in the act. If the member for the Conservative Party is so sure it is covered in the act, as the Prime Minister was, I suggest he read the letters they got from the Quebec Bar Association, and then maybe he will rise in caucus and in the House and tell the government: You are wrong, withdraw these measures because they are unfair.

Of course there are cases of abuse in any system and under any legislation. We have to correct this. We should not try to correct abuse by creating another kind of abuse. We must find a way to use our laws to deal with certain situations if there is abuse. I am sure the minister and his officials have never been able to determine the extent of abuse, if there was any, in the dismissal process.

Instead of treating everyone exactly the same, he could have taken a different approach and ensured that in these difficult times, when, unfortunately, a person loses his job, or in case of incompatibility, which does happen, or when there are certain reasons not covered by the Act, that a person can explain his position and receive benefits.

The Quebec Bar Association and a professor from the University of Quebec in Montreal say that if the government goes ahead with these changes, the judicial system will be flooded with cases, so much so that it will cost more than it does now. We saw what happened in the immigration sector with the refugees, because that cost a fortune. There are still many problems. Why not listen to people like the president of the Quebec Bar Association, since he has some very valid reasons? I repeat, we can hardly be accused of political partisanship since the Quebec Bar Association itself says these measures are unfair.

I see a number of my colleagues from Quebec who have made statements—I quoted some of them—who will take part in the debate this afternoon and will vote on the motion and stand up for their convictions. To give them some encouragement, I will quote the Minister of National Health and Welfare, the Conservative Quebec lieutenant, who told members and reporters, and I quote: "Conservative members are not just there to vote

with the government, without saying a word. They have their own opinions and they can express them". Express your opinions, express your convictions, and vote accordingly. I am sure that this evening, Canadians from coast to coast will be watching and will remember what you are about to do.

[English]

I just want to leave a few numbers with the House. It is inappropriate to have these measures at this time. I will relate my figures to the province I represent, which is the province of Quebec.

The number of beneficiaries in Quebec rose by 28,200 between October and November. It was 407,110 according to Statistics Canada, which is a government agency. One in three Canadians receiving UI benefits is a Quebecer. In Montreal, the ranks of UI beneficiaries swelled by nearly 4,000 in November according to Statistics Canada. There were 160,650 Montrealers on benefits in November. That was 3,960 more than in October and 2,050 more than in November 1991.

Montreal's long-term unemployment has meant that there will still be 25,380 more Montrealers collecting UI benefits than Torontonians in November. Nearly one in seven Canadians on UI is a Montrealer and those are just the official statistics. What about those who are not on the UI list anymore? What about those who are on social welfare or those who do not even qualify for social welfare who are trying to sell their houses and cannot even do that because the market is not there?

At the same time when everybody is crying and in difficulty, the government has the guts or the courage to propose an unjust program. It should never have been presented in the House. December 2 was just before Christmas. This shows the insensitivity of this government. That was its Christmas gift to Canadians. The government said that for any reason one quits a job—valid reasons but not necessarily justifiable in the law—one will not get any unemployment insurance.

I think this measure should be withdrawn immediately. This has been recommended not only by different unions, opposition members and a good dozen of Quebec Tory MPs, but also by the Quebec Bar Association that has no political interests and speaks in terms of its members and the law. The association says clearly in its statement that this law should not be implemented and that those rules should be withdrawn. I hope that the government will do that tonight by withdrawing those measures or as soon as possible.