

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on a report that I have not seen. I can only tell my hon. friend that our position is the one set out by the Minister of Finance when he said that he wanted to emphasize that we are not undertaking this review with an objective of reducing federal contributions to the unemployed. We have appointed an impartial group of people to analyse the problem. I will wait for their report and make determinations when we have received it.

[Translation]

FORGET COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS—GOVERNMENT POSITION

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister responsible for this work.

The Forget Commission is also recommending that severance pay and pensions be included in calculating unemployment insurance.

Will the Minister state clearly that the Government cannot accept this recommendation?

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Employment and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the New Democratic Party has a bad habit of taking part of a report as it appears in the press, treating it as though it had been received by the Government and asking questions about it.

The Forget Report will be tabled between now and November 30. At that time, all Members in and outside the House will have a chance to comment, and we will subsequently formulate our position. That is all. There is no Forget Report dated October 14, 1986.

[English]

PAYMENT OF BENEFITS IN ATLANTIC REGION

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, my question is also for the Prime Minister. During a visit to St. John's, Newfoundland, with his Cabinet the Prime Minister acknowledged that the economy of Atlantic Canada is seriously ill. According to comments made by three members of the Forget Commission yesterday and today, they want to cure the problem by killing the patient. Some \$727 million in UIC payments—three-quarters of \$1 billion—will be cut from the region if the recommendations of the Forget Commission are accepted by the Government. Will the Prime Minister give his assurance today that the Government will not keep his recent financial commitments by cutting \$3 billion in UIC payments from the Atlantic region?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend will understand, as I indicated to the Leader of the NDP, that I cannot, nor would he want me to, comment on a report that is unavailable to Members of the House and which I have not seen.

In regard to Atlantic Canada, I did indeed express the view in St. John's, and the regret of all Members of the House, that previous government policies over the past 15 years had failed dramatically to bring equality of opportunity to the people of Atlantic Canada. I am going down to Charlottetown on Thursday to put in place with the Premiers a new mechanism that we hope will bring about a greater degree of equality of opportunity for people in Atlantic Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, ask the Prime Minister a civil question, you get a petty, partisan answer.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

REGIONAL DISPARITY

Mr. Brian Tobin (Humber—Port au Port—St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Prime Minister this question. What area of the world will the "Minister for Regional Economic Third World Comparisons", the Hon. Member for St. John's West, ask the people of Atlantic Canada to look to if three-quarters—

• (1430)

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Order. The Hon. Member knows full well that he should put the question to a Minister and name the Minister. Would the Hon. Member put his question again, please?

Mr. Tobin: Mr. Speaker, let me put the question to the Prime Minister. To what region of Canada will the Government recommend that Atlantic Canadians look when the Prime Minister will not stand today to say he will not allow \$3 billion to be cut from UIC in that region? Does the Prime Minister plan to build a prison in every port of call in Atlantic Canada?

Right Hon. Brian Mulroney (Prime Minister): Mr. Speaker, I know how offended my hon. friend is by partisan references so I want to be very, very careful in that regard. I expressed what I am sure is the concern of all Members of the House of Commons when I indicated that our concern is that the relative prosperity that we are in the process of achieving is not fairly shared across Canada. That is a concern of Government and a concern of all Members of the House. We are working toward achieving a greater degree of equality.

I know my hon. friend will be pleased to learn, for example, that, when we came to office, the unemployment rate in Newfoundland was at 23.8 per cent and it has been reduced by 3.2 per cent already. While that is unacceptable, it indicates some degree of progress.