

*Government Orders*

that year, when the province has only 24 per cent of the Canadian population.

From the beginning, there was an East-West split in the decision to dip into the UI fund. In 1990, in Quebec, we had the report titled *Deux Québec dans un*. Some of my colleagues remember very well that that report identified two Quebecs: one that was participating in and benefitting from economic development, and the other, rural Quebec, that was excluded.

The measure proposed by the federal government also identifies two regions where unemployment and underemployment are most widespread. There is more widespread unemployment and underemployment in these regions than any measure contained in the red book can ever solve, despite the fact that those people have shouted themselves hoarse, some to the point of losing their voices, waving the red book and claiming that jobs were the priority of the Liberal government. In spite of all this, no concrete, meaningful, structural measures have been put into place in order to create sustainable employment. Instead, the government chose to take it out on two regions which do not deserve that, precisely because they are regions where underemployment and poverty are the most striking.

• (1655)

The measure to increase from 10 to 12 the number of weeks of insurable employment required to be eligible for unemployment benefits, which are themselves reduced in terms of percentage and of the number of weeks covered, has plunged several rural communities into utter confusion. These communities have already suffered, in the case of the Maritime Provinces, from the reduction of the fishing activity, from the reduction of the farming activity because of low prices and of the international crisis and from the reduction of forestry activity, all of which are seasonal.

The measure to increase from 10 to 12 the number of weeks of insurable employment required to be eligible for unemployment benefits directly affects the Maritime Provinces and part of Quebec, in particular the Lower St. Lawrence and the Matapédia—Matane areas and, in general, the Gaspé Peninsula. In these regions, where the activities are concentrated in one industry or are seasonal, many already had difficulty gathering the 10 weeks of insurable employment previously required.

I was flabbergasted when I realized that 60 per cent of unemployment insurance cutbacks would be made in the Maritimes and Quebec, particularly because the Maritimes were really hit in a horrible way. I was shocked when I thought that the current Prime Minister was once the member for Beauséjour and that, while he knew about the social and economic realities

of that riding, he had accepted, as leader of the government, that such disastrous measures for rural communities be put in place.

I was even more flabbergasted when I heard the Prime Minister allude recently to the people of Beauséjour and said that the unemployed were beer drinkers. I understood then that our Prime Minister, when treating the unemployed this way, the most disadvantaged people of our society, when saying things like that, was not a head of state because a head of state has to show respect for the people who elected him and allowed him to be the member for that riding for four years and to come back into politics. I found that to be really shocking, coming from a Prime Minister.

Besides, what we heard from the Prime Minister and what I saw in the committee which examined Bill C-17 are very much similar to systematic cynicism. I also had to live for two weeks with sarcastic remarks from my Liberal colleagues. I am still calling them my colleagues even though I am deeply disappointed with the attitude of the Liberal members on the finance sub-committee.

We had witnesses, mainly from remote areas in Quebec, such as the Lower St. Lawrence, the riding of my colleague from Matapédia—Matane, and also from Gaspé. People came before the finance sub-committee from Newfoundland and Labrador where, at times, unemployment reaches 85 per cent. These people do not know where to turn to. They had pinned their hopes on this new government which talked about creating jobs, as well as restructuring and diversifying regional economies. They believed in the government. So, now that it has hit them with those measures, they do not know where to turn to anymore.

We had people from Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and from both Acadian and anglophone communities in New Brunswick.

• (1700)

I will quote from a short newspaper article to illustrate the cynicism and the sarcasm shown by the Prime Minister who attended these sub-committee hearings. This article was entitled "New Brunswickers appearing before a sub-committee on unemployment insurance reform are kicked out after barely an hour". They kicked out people who came all the way from New Brunswick, even before their allotted time had expired.

If you allow me, I will quote Mrs. Mathilda Blanchard, who has been a union activist for the past 40 years. She said: "I have never been treated that way in my 40 years as a trade unionist". And you can read further that: "After coming to Ottawa, all the way from New Brunswick, to discuss the impact of unemployment insurance reform on her area, she and another group were cut short after only 30 minutes. The two other groups from New Brunswick that came after her were treated the same way".

In conclusion, the parliamentary committee which was reviewing Bill C-17 and certain budget provisions summoned to