

Statements by Ministers

[English]

To deal with this situation, I am today directing the commission to re-examine any such case and restore benefits, if the allegation is proven. The commission's normal adjudication process will apply. This is entirely consistent with the Government's action in similar cases in other benefit programs.

[Translation]

To bring these measures into force, I will be introducing legislation in the House and I will be seeking the co-operation of the Opposition parties to facilitate passage of this legislation.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to thank all members of this House for their advice on this matter. I wish to stress in particular the role played by the previous Minister of Employment and Immigration who is now Minister of Communications (Miss MacDonald). In a period that was particularly difficult, she devoted a lot of attention to this issue and thus contributed much to bring it to its conclusion today.

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, today is another great day for our senior citizens. Another victory, although to get this far, they had to sign petitions and come to Parliament Hill to make this Government admit that it was wrong, that it had made a mistake and that it was being unfair. Unfortunately, today's decision comes too late for the people who lost their homes. It comes too late for the person who committed suicide and asked for the ashes to be put on the desk of the Minister of Communications (Miss MacDonald).

Mr. Speaker, I think the Government should learn a lesson from decisions that were taken lightly and taken only to defend the interests of the rich. When the banks collapsed, depositors with up to \$60,000 in their accounts did not have to sign petitions and come to Parliament Hill to make themselves heard and be reimbursed. However, I do want to congratulate the present Minister for reacting quickly to requests, following the Forget report's recommendations, and for having dealt with this problem. I must say, however, that unless he has additional information, some of the news is disappointing. First of all, I agree with him where he talks about our people in the military and in the RCMP, but the fact remains that in many cases, the situation arises as a result of factory shutdowns, when the employee is entitled to draw his pension benefits. Although this person would be entitled to unemployment insurance benefits if he were to find a job, I wonder what someone who is 57, 58 or 60 years old is supposed to do between the time he loses his job as a result of a factory shutdown and the day he finds another job.

And I am thinking of the region where the Minister has his riding and the remote areas of this country. You know, when a factory closes down, as in Trois-Rivières for instance, the 50 or 60 people affected cannot find other employment right away. I think we will have to find a way to deal with this.

There is another point on which I would like more information. I am proud of the Government's decision, but I am disappointed about how it applies to people who retired in 1985. These people appealed the original decision, they had to make representations and spend money, and either positive or negative rulings were handed down. Do they have to go through that again to make sure they get what they are entitled to retroactively?

The Minister says he is going to provide criteria, and I would like to say to the Minister that I congratulate the people who are listening, the people of the Quebec coalition, the people from Quebec City and Montreal, the people of the AQDR who co-ordinated the coalition. I want to congratulate Mrs. Lalande from Quebec City and the *Comité d'action-chômeurs*, Mr. Marcoux, Mr. Cloutier, Mr. Plamondon, Mr. Fortin, all from Montreal, all these people who worked together to make the Government aware of the problem and force its hand. I think the people listening to us today may have reason to celebrate, but their work is not finished. They cannot stop their campaign because they have to be out there helping their colleagues and filling out forms, to make sure these people get what they are entitled to.

Mr. Speaker, you are indicating that time is limited. I conclude by saying to the Minister that we will co-operate so that this Bill will pass quickly. Perhaps he might be able to go a step further to correct a few things and see to it that the 1985 retirees do not face more delays caused by administrative red tape or communications problems and get their money before Christmas. I would point out to the Minister that this is the third time the Government has had to backtrack, so in the future he ought to be more careful when making decisions, particularly in the case of unemployment insurance. Make sure to consult people from now on, and you will avoid this kind of situation.

• (1530)

[English]

Mr. Neil Young (Beaches): Mr. Speaker, let me say to the Minister that his initiative is welcomed by myself and on behalf of my New Democratic Party caucus members. I can assure the Minister that we will do nothing to delay the implementation of this change in policy. However, that policy created a tremendous amount of frustration and anger among a large segment of the Canadian population, but I am sure the Minister is well aware of that. Nevertheless, it also raises a number of questions. The Minister's statement appears to be in response to the commission of inquiry into unemployment insurance, namely, the Forget Commission. Recommendation No. 26, as the Minister now knows, says:

The current treatment of pension income should be rescinded with an effective date of January 5, 1986.

It goes on to say:

The new policy should be announced and an implementation date of January 1, 1989 set.