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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, March 29, 2001

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, March 29, 2001

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

• (1000)

[English]

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the annual report and the employment equity report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission for the year 2000.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION REPORT

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege this morning as my rights as a member of parliament have been abused again.

I speak of the annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission which you just tabled in the House immediately prior to my speaking, but which has been reported extensively in the press this morning. For example, the *Toronto Star* and other papers have reported it at length.

This contempt of parliament by this unelected and unaccountable commission and the Minister of Justice is quite obvious. This is the second time in a month and a half that the commission has leaked one of its reports to the media prior to it being tabled in the House of Commons. I raised this as a question of privilege on February 15, 2001 at page 714.

When it comes to government doing business, I sometimes have to wonder if this House means anything to it or is it just a superfluous adjunct as it jumps over the heads of this institution to communicate directly with Canadian people.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that you speak out and protect the privileges of this House and its members.

Erskine May describes contempt as:

—any act or omission which obstructs or impedes either House of Parliament in the performance of its functions, or which obstructs or impedes any Member or officer of such House in the discharge of his duty, or which has a tendency, directly or indirectly, to produce such results may be treated as a contempt even though there is no precedent for the offence.

We do have precedence here. There are news articles, as I have referred to, the *Toronto Star*, the *Hamilton Spectator* and the *London Free Press*, detailing the exact contents of the annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission.

Annual reports to parliament are to remain secret and confidential until tabled in the House of Commons. Other agencies, crown corporations, the auditor general and so on are able to respect this tenet. Why is it that the Canadian Human Rights Commission believes that it is above the normal protocols and trashes them instead of respecting them?

The member of parliament for Provencher raised a similar point of order on March 14, 2001 at page 1646 of *Hansard* when he argued that his rights as a member of parliament were breached because of the contempt shown by the Minister of Justice to this House in excluding members of parliament from briefings on a bill prior to it being tabled in the House. Yet the media had the contents and substance of the bill published prior to its tabling.

Mr. Speaker, you ruled on March 19, 2001, at page 1839, that the member for Provencher had a prima facie case of privilege. Today we have a repeat of the same situation. The media had the contents and substance of the annual report while the members of parliament are in the dark.

The Canadian Human Rights Commission falls under the purview of the Minister of Justice.

• (1005)

While the commission is a quasi-judicial body, it still has to answer to both the minister and to parliament. There is a pattern here where the minister has contempt for this honourable and venerable institution.

Mr. Speaker, the situation is becoming intolerable. I ask that you find that there is prima facie case of the breach of my privileges. Since you ruled that way so recently, and it was obviously ignored, I ask that you recommend that the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs deal with the matter sternly.

Privilege

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I agree generally with what the hon. member has said. It is unfortunate, though, that he has chosen to trivialize such an important issue by somehow alleging that this has something to do with the government.

First, the commission reports to parliament. The Speaker just rose and tabled the report. This has nothing to do with an action of the government.

An action of the government, which I regret, occurred some days ago in the House for which instructions were clearly given about a protocol and giving these kinds of media briefings under embargo, which, as we now know, were not respected by members of the media. The Chair indicated to ministers that these things could only be done if done in a secure way, which I read to be a lockup or some such thing, but that was a different issue altogether.

Mr. Speaker ruled on the previous item and we accepted the ruling that he gave of prima facie and it is still before a parliamentary committee for further study.

In the case today, this was not a report that was given for the government to table. This was a report given directly to parliament and tabled in the House by the Speaker of the House. If someone has breached that, which obviously has happened, then I agree with the hon. member across. I do not object to what he has raised in the sense that it indicates rules were broken.

Where I do disagree with the hon. member is on the personal comment he made about the Minister of Justice, alleging that she was personally involved. He should retract his comment as he has no proof of that. The hon. member knows that the minister does not report that document. He knows that the minister is responsible for the estimates of that organization. That would be the same as alleging that because I am responsible for the estimates of Elections Canada, I am somehow responsible for the tabling or non-tabling, or the actions or non-actions of the Chief Electoral Officer, or that somehow the Minister of Justice would be responsible for adjudication of the supreme court. That is inappropriate and the hon. member knows that.

While I agree with the principle of what he has raised, the gratuitous accusations against the Minister of Justice and against the government are wrong and should be withdrawn. That being said, I agree with the point that he has raised about the inappropriateness of the commission or anyone who by negligence wilfully allows a report to leak out.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have to sit here with some amusement watching the feigned indignation of the government House leader over these personal comments.

However, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that because of the proximity in time, given your ruling, there is an opportunity here to bring this matter also before the procedure and house affairs committee to look at it.

The government House leader is right. The Minister of Justice is not personally responsible, but this goes to the principles of governmental and ministerial responsibility.

The Speaker: We have a situation here where a report, which was prepared by an officer of the House of Commons, a person who reports to the House of Commons directly, has obviously been given to the media, based on the information I am hearing in the House today.

The report stands permanently referred to the justice and human rights committee of the House. It seems to me that the appropriate course in the circumstances is for that committee to undertake its study of the report, as I am sure it will in due course. It is free to call the head of the commission and anyone else it sees fit to come and explain what has happened and the circumstances. It seems to me that would be the appropriate course.

Should the procedure and House affairs committee, as part of the work it is doing on the question of release of documents that has come to it as a result of my previous ruling, want to look at the matter, it is of course free to do so.

• (1010)

What I would suggest to the hon. member for St. Albert, the government House leader, the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough and all hon. members is that we let this go to the justice and legal affairs committee. If the committee has concerns about what has happened and feels that something inappropriate happened, I will allow the hon. member for St. Albert, if he wishes, to bring this matter back to the House. We will treat it as a matter of privilege and deal with it at that point.

However, I think that since this is a matter involving an officer of the House, I do not see that today there has been necessarily a breach of the privileges. The matter can be investigated by a committee. The committee can come back to the House or the member can come back to the House and raise it as a question of privilege when we have heard the evidence on it. There will be evidence. This matter is before the committee and making a finding today that sends it to the committee again is unhelpful.

I am aware that the procedure and House affairs committee is looking at the other matter as a result of my ruling and I am sure that should it choose to do so, it could look into this matter also, but certainly the justice and legal affairs committee can do so.

I hope that hon. members can deal with it there and then, if we have to, we will come back to the House and deal with it here.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[Translation]

ESTIMATES

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to table, on behalf of my colleagues, part III of the Estimates consisting of 87 departmental expenditure plans and priorities.

These documents will be distributed to the members of the standing committees to assist in their consideration of the spending authorities sought in part II of the Estimates.

* * *

[English]

AIR TRAFFIC COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Transport and pursuant to Standing Order 32(2) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the first report of the air travel complaints commissioner, Mr. Bruce Hood.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to two petitions.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. This morning I just heard about contempt for the House and it had to deal with another issue. There is contempt in the House once again.

The *Toronto Star* has an article about Ottawa extending benefits to more veterans. Of course we all want more benefits for our veterans but the statement by the minister is that the announcement by the veterans affairs minister could come as early as Thursday with regard to allowing benefits for those Canadians who served in the gulf war or Balkans. They are to be awarded full veteran status.

Routine Proceedings

This should not have gone to the *Toronto Star* until it came to the veterans affairs committee and to the House. This is total contempt—

The Speaker: The hon. member is aware that ministers are free to make announcements in the House, in committee or on the street. The House for a long time has not enforced any right, and indeed it is questionable whether it ever had any right, to demand that all announcements be made here.

I know the hon. member may be outraged that the statement was made somewhere else but these things happen and the Chair is powerless to do much about it.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade on the issue of softwood lumber. This represents the first report of the subcommittee on international trade disputes and investments.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts with regard to international financial reporting guidelines and standards for the public sector.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109 of the House of Commons, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to the report.

* * *

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION REVIEW ACT

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-322, an act to provide for a House of Commons committee to study proportional representation in federal elections.

● (1015)

He said: Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the bill is to begin a study of the idea of proportional representation in terms of changing the voting system in Canada. We are one of few countries in the world that does not use some measure of PR.

The purpose of the bill is to look into what model might be appropriate and then put that model before the Canadian people.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

Government Orders

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[English]

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, could the parliamentary secretary inform the House when he will be providing an answer to Question No. 31, which asked the government to announce the date upon which it will finalize a just and full settlement for our merchant navy veterans.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, Question No. 31 is of course in the pipeline. The answer will be forthcoming in due course and well within the timeline projected in the standing orders.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, the government tabled a response to my questions, Question Nos. 1 and 2, regarding Huey helicopters and Challenger jets, for which I waited close to a year. There are gaping holes in those responses. Some of those questions have not been answered.

I guess, Mr. Speaker, I am looking for guidance from the Chair. Where do individual members of parliament go from here when questions are not answered on the order paper? I waited almost a year only to find out they had not been answered. That is a violation of our individual rights as members of parliament. It does not allow us to effectively do our jobs.

The Speaker: The hon. member has a wonderful remedy under the rules. He could put down the questions that were not answered on the order paper and right after that have them transferred for debate. He could have a great time at 6.30 some evening with a four minute speech on the subject and a two minute reply from a parliamentary secretary. I am sure he would find that experience rich and rewarding.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, on that point of order, I could not help listen to your suggestion to my hon. colleague about putting it on the late show. That in itself presents a problem. When we raise a question on the late show we expect the minister to be there to discuss the details of the question. However we have a parliamentary secretary sometimes—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member. It is not for the Chair to defend who speaks and when. I am sure that if the

hon. member pleaded with the minister he might get it. I have seen ministers here at late shows.

Mr. Yvon Godin: When was that?

The Speaker: Not frequently but I have seen it. I know that hon. members will find innovative ways to use the rules to their advantage.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-2, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance (Fishing) Regulations, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Ten motions in amendment are listed in the notice paper at the report stage of Bill C-2.

[English]

Motions Nos. 1 to 3 and 5 to 7 cannot be proposed to the House because they are not accompanied by a recommendation from Her Excellency the Governor General. Standing Order 76(3) requires that notice of such a recommendation be given no later than the sitting day before the beginning of report stage consideration of a bill.

Since the Standing Committee on Human Resources and the Status of Persons with Disabilities considered this bill at clause by clause stage on March 21, the same day as my statement outlining the guidelines for the selection of motions at report stage, the Chair will exercise discretion and select motions which could have been proposed in committee but were not.

- (1020)

I would ask all hon. members to note that this is the last report stage ruling where the Chair will be taking into account the timing of clause by clause study in committee, relative to my March 21 statement on the guidelines for the selection of motions at report stage.

[Translation]

Consequently, in connection with the report stage of future bills, I have asked my representatives to examine each motion in amendment submitted at report stage to see whether it could have been presented at committee stage, and if so not to select it.

That said, the Chair must acknowledge that one or two motions in amendment are sometimes indispensable to a debate on a bill,

and hon. members could argue that they deserve to be examined in the House, even if there has already been an examination of them in committee. I will agree to hear such arguments and I encourage hon. members to examine this type of motion with my representatives as soon as the bill is returned to the House.

As we are all aware, there is often a very tight timeframe for the report stage, which may be a hindrance to debate. I am relying on the cooperation of hon. members to ensure that the Chair is kept fully informed, via its representatives, of their opinions when it examines each preliminary decision at report stage. I will do my utmost to be fair and impartial in the choice of amendments and I am convinced that hon. members will acknowledge and respect the principles set out in my decision of March 21 in order to assist me in this.

[English]

To repeat some of those words:

I . . . strongly urge all members and all parties to avail themselves fully of the opportunity to propose amendments during committee stage so that the report stage can return to the purpose for which it was created, namely for the House to consider the committee report and the work that the committee has done, and to do such further work as it deems necessary to complete detailed consideration of the bill.

[Translation]

Motion No. 4 and Motions Nos. 8 through 10 will be grouped for debate. The voting patterns for the motions within each group are available at the table. The Chair will remind the House of each pattern at the time of voting.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ) moved:

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-2, in Clause 4, be amended by replacing line 22 on page 3 with the following:

“in paragraph 12(3)(a), (b) or (c) in the period of”

Motion No. 8

That Bill C-2, in Clause 8, be amended by replacing lines 8 to 11 on page 4 with the following:

“(3) For greater certainty, weeks of benefits that are repaid as a result of an act or omission mentioned in subsection (1) are not deemed to be weeks of benefits paid”

Motion No. 9

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting Clause 9.

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC) moved:

Motion No. 10

That Bill C-2, in Clause 9, be amended by replacing lines 14 to 20 on page 4 with the following:

Government Orders

“9. Section 66 of the Act is replaced by the following:

66. (1) The Commission shall, with the approval of the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister and the Minister of Finance, set the premium rate for each year at a rate that the Commission considers will, to the extent possible,

(a) ensure that there will be enough revenue over a business cycle to pay the amounts authorized to be charged to the Employment Insurance Account; and

(b) maintain relatively stable rate levels throughout the business cycle.

(2) Notwithstanding subsection (1), the premium rate shall not exceed \$2.20 for the year 2002 and \$2.10 for the year 2003.

(3) When setting the premium rate for a year in accordance with subsection (1), the Commission shall provide a written explanation as to why the premium rate is set at that level for the year.

(4) The Commission's explanation under subsection (3) shall be referred for review to the standing committee designated by Parliament for that purpose.”

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to speak to Bill C-2 at report stage, not so much for the amendments that are included therein, apart from the one on clause 9, but rather because the debate in committee clearly demonstrated that Bill C-2 did not meet the needs of those who appeared before the committee.

Instead of putting forward an indepth reform of the employment insurance plan, Bill C-2 proposes no more than a few amendments that have been called for for a long time, particularly the suppression of the intensity rule. Since 1997 this rule penalizes all seasonal workers. We are telling them that if we take away 1% of their benefits every 20 weeks, they should be more encouraged to work.

The government always assumed that seasonal workers preferred to collect EI instead of working. After denouncing that for many years, a statistical study finally proved that there was no correlation between the two.

● (1025)

Workers in seasonal industries want to work but unfortunately their jobs do not last the entire year, and the fact of penalizing these people by taking away up to 5% of their benefits after three years would not in any way make them work any harder as there were no more jobs for these people.

These people often work in natural resources such as forestry, fisheries, tourism or in areas where they cannot be readily trained for work in other sectors.

Bill C-2 did not really meet the requirements set out by over 60 groups that systematically came to tell us it was vital to reform the system much more thoroughly. Fortunately the committee unanimously adopted a motion I proposed, which provides:

Government Orders

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities report to the House of Commons all other amendments to the Employment Insurance Act and that this report be tabled to the House no later than June 1, 2001.

The committee will do the work the government refused to do during the period between the election and the reconvening of parliament. The government could have avoided this delay of several months and introduced a Bill C-2 that really reformed the employment insurance system. It did not do so, but all members of the committee assumed their responsibilities, listened to the evidence presented and clearly said they wanted to recommend other changes to the employment insurance system.

Obviously the current bill must be improved as much as possible, and this is what we are doing with the amendments proposed. There is one that is much more important, and we will discuss it later. It concerns the elimination of clause 9, the one that would, if the bill were passed as it stands, make it legal to misappropriate funds from the employment insurance fund.

We know that it has now grown to between \$34 billion and \$35 billion. With the provision in the bill that would allow the government to set the premium rate instead of letting the EI commission do it, the government could evade the application of the act and not have to put the money back in the EI fund.

When we get to the discussion on this clause, people will see that all the opposition parties have a common position in this regard, a position set out by the Bloc Québécois but also supported by the auditor general who stated in committee that he preferred section 66 of the current act, in spite of its weaknesses, to this clause, which would allow the government to determine the premium rate.

We are at report stage on a bill we have to improve as much as possible, a bill we were unable to amend substantively to really reform the employment insurance system because this is impossible at the parliamentary level. Once Bill C-2 was introduced we could only amend its clauses as they stood.

For instance, we are not allowed to deal with important issues such as eliminating the waiting period. Those who have been on employment insurance know what we are talking about. It is the first two weeks after one has stopped working, when one has no income. That is an archaic rule dating back to the time when people qualified only after a number of weeks of benefits. Now they start paying premiums from their first hour of work. We have a system that is generating a huge surplus, so why could we not deal with this issue and eliminate the waiting period?

There is also, the fundamental issue of the creation of an independent EI fund. I think this will give rise to a major debate that should be held in committee for its June 1 recommendations.

There is the increase in coverage from 55% to 60%. We know we now have an employment insurance system where about \$18 billion in premiums is collected year after year and about \$12 billion is put back into the system. There is a surplus of about \$6 billion, which is used to cover the government's general expenditures. This is being done by collecting premiums from people earning wages or a salary of less than \$39,000. This means that people earning more, or those who do not pay into the system, do not contribute their share toward this portion of the government's general expenditures.

The government, considers the EI system as a payroll tax. This is a very regressive tax, because not everyone pays into the system. Even though he had been a member of parliament for about 20 years, it is here in the House that the Prime Minister found out that he pay, EI premiums. Such people are not paying their share. There should be a substantive debate on this issue to ensure that since the surplus is so high premiums are lowered or the conditions that apply in the system are improved.

There is a basic condition that could be amended: benefits could be raised from 55% to 60% of average earnings.

• (1030)

All discrimination against youth, women and people re-entering the workforce must be eliminated.

Bill C-2 does not change anything in the requirement to work 910 hours to qualify. The government's logic is the same here as with the intensity rule. It is saying to young people "If the requirement is 910 hours, you will have to work harder to qualify". Under the intensity rule it said "If benefits are reduced, people will be more anxious to work".

Statistics show this was not the case with the intensity rule. We know from experience that it is not true for young people and that today they are the victims of intolerable discrimination.

It is important that we revisit this issue before long because we have no right to discriminate against our young people. We have no right to treat them like second class citizens, particularly as we are experiencing a period of economic growth. They must be able to reap the benefits of the effort that has been made to fight the deficit. We must not continue to take their money from them since they contribute right from the first hour of work without qualifying. Only some 25% of our young people qualify for benefits.

As far as all the conditions are concerned, these are examples of issues that should have been dealt with in Bill C-2 but were not. That shows the extent to which a thorough reform of EI is needed to make it more adequate.

Many amendments were proposed but they were rejected. I give the example of the retroactivity of the intensity rule. According to

our proposal, the retroactive period would have gone back to January 1, 1997, instead of to October 1, 2000.

In other words, since it has been clearly established that rule was inefficient and that its only result was to penalize seasonal workers and frequent claimants, why not give these workers their money back? It is becoming obvious that they have been penalized without reason and that they should have received that money.

We introduced an amendment to make the payment retroactive to January 1, 1997, but the government rejected it because it would cost \$250 million, which is not even 1% of the \$35 billion surplus. If that is so much money for the government, think what this represents for seasonal workers, for people who contributed to the financing of the government due to an infamous and unacceptable rule.

That is the reason Bill C-2 must be amended. Everybody must realize that in the next few months the Standing Committee on Human Resources will be making a special effort to make recommendations for a thorough reform of EI to the government, one that will go a lot further than this half-baked Bill C-2.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION REPORT

[*English*]

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. At 10 o'clock this morning you tabled the annual report of the Canadian Human Rights Commission in the House. The commission, as an office of parliament, reports directly to the House.

I rose immediately thereafter, pointing out that my privileges had been breached by the fact that the report was all over the media this morning, in the *Toronto Star*, the *Hamilton Spectator* and the *London Free Press*, and that it should have been confidential until tabled in the House.

After I left the House at 10.25 a.m. I asked one of the pages to obtain the report for me. The page went to Journals and Journals said that it did not have the report. Journals checked with distribution and the report had not arrived. That was at 10.25 a.m.

At 11 o'clock the chair of the Human Rights Commission is having a press conference to speak about the report at the press conference centre. At 10.30 a.m. we do not have the report in the House available for members even though the chair is going to have a press conference to speak to Canadians. We have been

Government Orders

denied a copy of the report that has been tabled in the House already. There are none available. None have been delivered.

● (1035)

This is an affront to the House. There seems to be no limit to what this commission will do to disregard its responsibility to report to the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I thank the hon. member for pointing this out to the Chair. I will take it under advisement. I will consult with the Speaker and ask him to report to the House later today.

* * *

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-2, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance (Fishing) Regulations, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise a few issues based on the amendments that have been placed before the House at report stage.

The Canadian Alliance is very much in support of an employment insurance program. We feel the government is justified in providing support to the unemployed to help them in times of stress.

We have heard many of the witnesses who have appeared before the committee over the last four or five weeks. We have heard many witnesses talking about the government's approach to making some minor amendments to the Employment Insurance Act through Bill C-2. In looking at the motions that have been allowed, with all due respect to the Chair, I have some concern with the process of limiting members on how they would present amendments on legislation, whether it would be through a more public process in the House or a more limited public exposure process in committee. I do want to point out that I have a concern with that.

However, I would like to make a few comments on a number of the motions that have been allowed to amend Bill C-2 at report stage. In my understanding, Motion No. 4 adds an exemption for a person who is considered to be a return claimant or a new entrant. We recognize that there are some exemptions such as maternity and paternal reasons. There is an omission that we agree needs to be addressed, and that is the omission of benefits for claimants by reason of illness, injury or quarantine. We have no problem in rectifying that omission in the amendments to the legislation. We feel it is justified.

Government Orders

Just flipping through the pages of those amendments that have not been allowed, we come to an amendment that is trying to address what is considered to be an unfairness. The feeling seems to be that someone who has fraudulently misrepresented the facts should not be penalized and should be treated the same as any other claimant under the EI program. We have difficulty with that, because one of the changes the government has put in is that those who have made a claim for employment benefits of more than a week in the last 10 years fall into the category of having 30% clawed back if they make more than \$48,000.

If somebody who collected two weeks of insurable earnings 10 years ago is put under this 30% clawback for any income over \$48,000, it is hard to justify not penalizing someone who has misrepresented the facts and who perhaps fraudulently claimed earnings he or she did not make. It is hard to imagine that people would not be penalized for doing so.

We will not be supporting that amendment. We find it very difficult to justify supporting somebody who deliberately scams the system while penalizing people who may have collected employment insurance 10 years ago for a couple of weeks. We are not prepared to support this.

However, I want to give most of my attention to clause 9 in this legislation, which causes us great concern. Clause 9 just supports the trend of the Liberal government, ever since I came to the House seven and a half years ago, of removing responsibility from the House of Commons, from parliament, and putting it into the hands of the cabinet, into the executive branch of government.

This has been a consistent trend in legislation. Through regulations, through using orders in council or through legislation itself, the Liberal government is transferring the responsibilities of the House of Commons, of parliament or of an independent commission to the hands of a handful of people in cabinet.

• (1040)

We heard from almost every witness that this is not acceptable. They had great difficulty with cabinet setting the rates of the employment insurance fund. They saw it as an intrusion of government into something that government should be removing itself from. They saw it as a grab for the wealth that has been created through surpluses in the EI fund. They felt it was a means for the government to try to control where the surplus goes. They felt that the surplus would not go where it is intended to go and where legislation says it must go, which is to the workers and the employers who contribute to that fund.

I believe the fund has a \$35 billion surplus to date. There is concern that the government wants to get its hands on that surplus and take it out of the EI account. There is concern that the

government wants to control rate setting so it can control this unwarranted increase in surplus in the EI fund. The chief actuary for the employment insurance fund has said that the surplus is unnecessary, that \$35 billion is far too much and \$15 billion would sustain the employment insurance program even at a time of recession, and that lowering rates to \$1.75 for the employee would still sustain the employment insurance fund at a level during a recessionary period.

All the evidence is there that this \$35 billion surplus is not necessary. Yet we have a cabinet that wants to take control of rate setting so it can maintain that surplus fund to use for purposes outside the Employment Insurance Act.

We very much oppose this clause and support the amendment put forward by both the Bloc and the Canadian Alliance to delete that clause from the legislation.

I noted with interest an amendment that was put forward by the Conservative Party. Unfortunately, we in our party only got it this morning and did not have time to deal with it. We noted with interest that the Conservatives have proposed an amendment to that clause which details how we would treat rate setting and how we would re-establish the commission's authority. However, although we like the concept, there is no evidence to support the numbers that have been proposed. Nothing suggests they are the right numbers, so we would not at this time be prepared to support that amendment. We feel that more time is needed and we feel that more evidence is needed to support the numbers brought before us for consideration today.

My remarks have been a brief summary of where the Canadian Alliance stands on the amendments being proposed at report stage. I want to reiterate my concern that the Chair is going to take away from members of parliament their discretion in regard to when they want amendments to be dealt with, whether that is in less public circumstances like committees or a more public situation such as the House of Commons during report stage. I want it to be noted that I have a problem with this.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to participate in the debate on Bill C-2 today.

Unfortunately my Motion No. 5 on increasing from four to five years the authorized period of absence was rejected. This is unfortunate because the purpose of the motion was to harmonize our system with what the government grants its own employees who are authorized a period of absence of five years.

One thing that can be said about the bill on employment insurance is that the more than 60 witnesses we heard at the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development did not

talk about what was in Bill C-2 but mostly about what Bill C-2 was not providing for Canadians and workers.

For example, on the issue of the divisor rule there is the period during which the unemployed receive employment insurance benefits. The amount they receive; is now equal to 50% of their wages or salary, but even 55% would not be enough.

• (1045)

We must keep in mind that 55% of \$7 is only \$3.75. This is less than welfare; it is less than social assistance. That is our employment insurance plan in Canada, a plan which is funded by Canadian workers. The federal government grabbed the cash in the fund to pay its own debt and balance the budget, at the expense of people who had lost their jobs.

That is crystal clear. During the committee hearings all Canadians who came to Ottawa to testify and express their views on behalf of the Prince Edward Island chamber of commerce, labour federations or municipalities with many seasonal workers described how workers were hurt by employment insurance changes.

Today the government brings us Bill C-2, a clone of Bill C-44. This is mere cloning, a procedure which should not be legal in Canada. The government did not make a single change in Bill C-2 which is before the House. During the election campaign the Liberals themselves promised some changes.

I remember my colleague for Madawaska—Restigouche stating that he would run as a Liberal because he wanted to be elected as a member for the governing party. He felt Bill C-44 did not go far enough and he wanted to make changes to the employment insurance plan. What kind of changes did we get? None, if we compare Bill C-2 with Bill C-44.

The hon. member for Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok boasted about wanting to be on the government's side to make changes to the employment insurance because the changes brought in by the Liberals were hurting workers in the Gaspé. I remember the first meeting with the minister when he said "I make a heartfelt appeal to the minister". This was broadcast in all news programs: he wanted to change the EI plan. Precious little has changed.

The result is a measly 5% for the poor and the clawback rule for full time workers. This is what we got, but this is not what we need. The problem lies in the fact that some families are without any income from February to May. When families are suffering there is a problem.

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The two members who ran as Liberal candidates, as did the member for Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, said "I want to be on the government side like my father, so as to be able to bring about changes". However we have yet to hear from him since his election. We have never heard him. We have never heard from him state his position.

Today I am pleased that the committee, regardless of the party to which his members belong, approved a motion from the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, whose objective is that a report be submitted to parliament by June 1. We hope that the members who made promises in their ridings will have enough backbone to make the Liberals change their mind, including the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister who know that they are hurting Canadians.

Let us not forget that when there is a father or mother whose EI benefits run out and is without any income in February there are children involved. If we want to eliminate poverty in Canada, we should begin at that level.

I am ashamed when I think that there are 800,000 people who cannot qualify for employment insurance and that government investigators harass workers, call them into their offices and tell them behind closed doors "You realize that if you do not tell me the truth you could end up in jail", something which the police itself cannot do with criminals on the street. That is shameful.

I am ashamed of the way the Department of Human Resources Development is run. A thorough clean-up is in order in that department because this plan belongs to the workers and businesses that contribute to it. Seasonal work in Canada is a fact of life.

• (1050)

We do not want our loggers, our factory workers and our tourism industry workers to be forced to rely on social assistance. The same goes for people working in peat bogs.

Is it the only solution that the government can propose to us? I do not accept that. I do not agree with the way the Liberals are handling the employment insurance issue. Their robbery is the biggest ever covered in Canada by an insurance company. This is unbelievable and unacceptable.

I hope that the cry from the heart of the hon. member for Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok will touch the heart of the Prime Minister once and for all and will cause him to change his position and do something. We know that the Liberals are under dictatorship. Before retiring after 38 years of service to the House of Commons the Prime Minister could do a good thing for Canadians for once by taking care of the most disadvantaged in our society.

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When people who worked all their life as loggers, in fish plants and in peat bogs see their electrical service cut off because they cannot even pay their bills from February to May, we must realize that action is needed.

I have said it often, almost every day, in committee that one cannot catch lobster on Yonge Street in Toronto or cod on St. Catherine Street in Montreal. One has to go to Chaleur Bay or to the Pacific. These jobs are seasonal jobs.

For those who do not know, Chaleur Bay freezes over in winter. One cannot catch cod as if it were sportfishing, by making a hole in the ice. This is not the way it works. One needs boats plying the waters of Chaleur Bay to catch this fish. People like to have this fish on their table.

We are happy to have products from the farm, but it is quite difficult to grow carrots under snow.

We will have to acknowledge the fact that there are seasonal jobs in Canada. There is not a single seasonal worker in our country but there are seasonal jobs. Workers are not the ones who decide. There is nothing they can do if a week before their employer tells them that there is no more work for them because he has reached his lumber quota and can no longer cut down trees.

Workers are not responsible if their employer tells them, after August 15, which is the feast of the Acadians and when there are no tourists left, that he now has to lay them off for winter. The employee is not the one who decides. He is not seasonal, but jobs are.

I know that some members across believe what I say. It is not a coincidence if sometimes when we leave the House some Liberals shake our hands and say "Continue the fight, go on. We must make the government aware of the issue".

I would like to draw the government's attention to the fact that that money is not its own to spend. I have full confidence in Canadians. I can say very confidently that there are no lazybones in Canada.

I said once that if my predecessor, Doug Young, had been paid \$5.50 an hour, he too would have been lazy and unwilling to work. If we had good jobs for people they would be happy to get up in the morning, go to work and get their paycheque at the end of the week in order to pay their bills and take part in activities with their families.

Members across the way went so far as to call the unemployed lazybones unwilling to work, something I never accepted. I said I would never accept such statements as long as I represented the people of Acadie—Bathurst in the House. I know that my time has expired, but I could talk for hours about the injustices committed by the Liberals.

I will now conclude by saying that today I am asking the Liberals to listen to what I have said in the name of workers across Canada, those of Quebec as well as all the others, to change their mind about employment insurance by the end of June and to ensure that we have a bill that is good for workers.

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent of the House to allow my friend, the member for Acadie—Bathurst, to carry on with his speech.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

• (1055)

[English]

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I can be as entertaining as the member from Bathurst, but I will do my best.

We support the bill before us. We will not hold up the legislation. There are many deficiencies in it, as pointed out by many members. However the truth is that some of the changes they are bringing in, especially the elimination of the intensity rule which discriminates against and penalizes workers who have drawn unemployment over a series of years, would eliminate some of those deficiencies. The intensity rule amounts to about 5% of a person's benefit if he or she has collected employment insurance in the past. We support its elimination.

Some things should have been addressed in the bill which are important to the people of Canada, especially in communities where seasonal work is a reality. That is where the bill falls down. As members of the opposition we cannot have everything our way, and we understand that. However one thing that should be considered in future legislation is a better identification of areas that depend on seasonal workers. Those areas are penalized under the existing rules which determine the unemployment rate in regions.

For example, in southwestern New Brunswick communities that depend on seasonal workers are lumped in with bigger communities like Saint John and Fredericton which have their own problems in terms of unemployment. It makes the number artificially low in some areas where it is in fact a lot higher. The government has the capacity to more accurately measure the unemployment rate within those communities. That is important because the number of hours people must work to qualify for employment insurance varies depending on the rate of unemployment within their area.

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For example, in the last official census, which I believe was in 1996, the unemployment rate in communities in and around Black's Harbour, New Brunswick, and some of the Fundy Islands was as high as 45%. However when lumped in with bigger centres the unemployment rate in those communities is disguised, in a sense, or not obvious. It goes from 45% down to 7% or 8% because of the larger population in the city areas. That is unfair and it punishes seasonal workers. It is not addressed in the bill and it should be.

Another point with regard to seasonal workers is the premium rate. The premium rate is the money we all pay in Canada as employees, and it is much higher than it should be. Between an employee and an employer about \$5 is paid in for every \$100 of earnings. That is too high. As evidence of exactly how high it is, the government now has a surplus of \$35 billion in the employment insurance fund.

The government's own chief actuary has told us the premium rate should be lower. For example, employees across the country are paying in \$2.25 on \$100 of earnings. The chief actuary has told the government the rate could be as low as \$1.75. That does not seem like a lot of money except when we see that the total figure between an employee and an employer is \$5 on \$100 of earnings. That is 5%.

• (1100)

That is one of the reasons every man, woman and child in the country who is contributing is making the finance minister look a lot better than what he would have been. The surplus is being used to balance the books and to make debt reduction more of a success than it otherwise would have been.

We have a \$35 billion surplus in the fund. None of that is addressed in the bill, except in the perverse sense that the government wants to keep the \$35 billion and enhance it. It wants to take away the right of the commission to set the rate.

I have moved an amendment today that we are discussing, Motion No. 10. The amendment says that the commission should be left intact. It should be provided with the ability to set the rate. In the bill the government would take away the right of the commission to set the rate. It is blatantly attempting to politicize the EI fund. It is a question of greed.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne: Keep all the money.

Mr. Greg Thompson: Keep the money, as the member for Saint John says. The \$35 billion is just a notational entry in the finance minister's books. The government says the money is from the EI fund and it is for the finance minister to keep. However it is the workers and the employers, rich and poor, who contributed to that \$35 billion. The government has the audacity to want to keep the

rate as high as it is for its own purposes, for its own bookkeeping purposes.

That is what my amendment addresses. It says to let the commission do its job. The chief actuary should do his job, and when he makes a recommendation to the government or to the commission it should be acted upon. Up to now it has not been able to do anything because the government is stripping away its power.

Every time the government wants to do something, the commission kowtows to the power of the government. That is even more blatant in the act. It would completely take away the power of the commission which is wrong.

The government's intent is to maximize premiums and minimize benefits. It has a great record for doing that and the bill would allow it to continue doing that. That is one of our problems as an opposition party. We do not want to hold up the bill because there are some good parts in it that we support.

The danger in opposition is that if we hold up the bill or stall it, the government will then accuse us of holding up a bill that will do some good, which is true. Some things are right in the bill, but the truth is that the bill should have been a little wider in scope. It should not take away the power of the commission to set the rates.

The auditor general has said the same. It is wrong for the government to take away the powers of the commission and to ignore the reality that the rate could be a lot lower than it is today. The rate could be as low as \$1.75 per \$100 of earnings. That \$1.75 could sustain the fund even during a downturn in the economy.

The government wants to take away the powers of the commission, which we feel is wrong. It has to take a look at its internal guidelines in terms of how it interprets the employment insurance act and be a little more considerate of those people who need employment insurance. The auditor general has mentioned this as well.

The investigative powers, the proficiency and the knowledge level of some of the people within the department have to be addressed. A lot of people are being unfairly discriminated against in terms of their abilities to collect employment insurance, which was borne out last night in a CBC documentary film called *Country Canada*. The headline story was "P.E.I. fishers fight government to clear their names". The same thing is taking place in other parts of Canada.

• (1105)

Ms. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we are debating report stage of Bill C-2, the minor reforms to the existing EI legislation that the government brought forward.

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We saw a large number of witnesses in committee, all of whom contributed their time and input to give us a better understanding of the potential impact of the legislation. We heard from business and labour, from fishermen from both coasts, from restaurateurs, and from a host of others. Not one of them could bring themselves to support the bill in its entirety.

My colleague and chief critic from South Surrey—White Rock—Langley and I, together with the witnesses, agree that the bill is tinkering at its best. It addresses what the government considers flaws in the 1996 EI reforms, but it fails even at that small task.

Rather than continue what it began in 1996, that is to discourage repeat users of the EI as a wage supplement program, the bill actually takes a step backward. During the testimony in committee most of the witnesses were looking for a more indepth review of the entire employment insurance system. We concur that the bill is not broad enough to cover their concerns.

At report stage we deal with amendments. My colleague has moved an amendment calling for the deletion of clause 9 of the bill and our colleagues from the Bloc have essentially moved the same amendment as well. I hope all hon. members support the amendment. The clause as written would give EI premium rate setting powers to the governor in council for the next two years. Clause 9 is a blatant hijacking of the rights of the employment insurance commission.

The government indicates that it is only giving rate setting powers to the cabinet for two years. If hon. members believe that the cabinet would give the powers back after those two years, I have some land in Shawinigan that they may want to have a look at.

I will explain what the clause means. It is an issue that has widespread opposition from both employers and unions. They may have different objectives with the rates, but they all have problems with the way the government uses EI premiums in general revenue. Employers and unions objected that cabinet was taking control of the EI rate setting process since the Liberal government balanced the EI books on the backs of employers and employees.

The government wants complete control over the billions in the EI surplus. It is one more unhealthy, undemocratic example of the government consolidating control in cabinet. The Canadian business community is in almost unanimous opposition to the bill. It is not that it feels that people in seasonal industries do not need assistance. It feels it should not come from the EI fund to which it provides 60% of the funding.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce thinks Bill C-2 is inconsistent with the development of advanced skills or entrepreneurial spirit and that it does not advance competitiveness. Catherine Swift

of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business had this to say about the legislation:

After several years of making some steps in the right direction on EI policy, this is a U-turn that harkens back to the 1970s—a big spending government promoting dependency on programs, instead of solid economic growth. We thought they had learned something from the mistakes of the past.

We have a flawed bill which seeks only to roll back earlier reforms and enhance the power of cabinet. What are the alternatives?

● (1110)

First and foremost, we must state that seasonal industries are just that, seasonal. Seasonal industries are very important and those involved in them must be supported. Those who are rendered unemployed for other reasons must also be supported.

There needs to be an acknowledgement that the two are not the same. The solution to the seasonal work dilemma must lie in the direction of education and training. Young people in communities which traditionally rely on seasonal employment must be properly equipped with the job skills for the workplace of the 21st century. We must provide training for those currently involved in traditionally seasonal employment as an alternative to EI.

In conclusion, as the first bill introduced in this parliament it is quite a disappointment. Bill C-2 attempts to address flaws in the EI system but succeeds at only minor tweaking. The government was moving in the right direction before but has taken an about-face with the legislation. I encourage all hon. colleagues to join with us in opposition to the bill.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise to speak to Bill C-2.

First I want to tell members how deeply moving I found the 60 statements or so that we heard during the committee's hearings. They disturbed me because they were a cold and profound reflection of the needs of the Canadian and Quebec societies.

To briefly resume the situation, we now have before us Bill C-2, the former Bill C-40 introduced in 1996. This bill does not bring about the radical changes requested by Canadians as a whole, unions, women's groups, young people, boards of trade, employers and all the representatives of the Canadian and Quebec populations.

I would like to quote parts of some briefs tabled by people who appeared before the committee. I think it is important to read them into the record and to remember what those people had to say.

As the House knows, and I would like to congratulate my Bloc colleague who introduced this motion, in committee we succeeded, with the assistance of the government, in asking for a report from

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the committee which will be able to examine all the briefs and report back to the House before June 1.

We hope that it will advance the cause of unemployed workers and not just ease the government's conscience. This report has to lead to something concrete, to major changes in the EI plan.

I want to come back to certain labour unions, including the CSN, which represents a good 250,000 workers in Quebec. The following is a short passage from its brief:

As for the amendments in Bill C-2, the CSN feels that these are half measures which will not result in access for those workers who have lost their job because of changes in the work place.

I will now read a few lines from the FTQ brief.

FTQ members would have hoped for much more from EI reform. We feel that the legislator does not go far enough to right the wrongs of past reforms.

That was what the FTQ had to say. Another labour confederation in Quebec, the CSD, put it this way:

A decent reform would not give the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Finance the authority to set premium rates, when it was the employment insurance commission that used to have this authority.

This is an unacceptable ploy that will give the government unfettered access to surpluses in the EI fund, because premium rates will no longer hinge on self-funding but on the government's financial needs.

• (1115)

We are not the ones saying so; the CSD is.

My last quotations will be from the auditor general, in whom we have the utmost confidence.

Bill C-2, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act, and Chapter 34 of the December 2000 Report, lack clarity on the basis used in setting employment insurance rates.

A little later on in his statement the auditor general adds:

The introduction of Bill C-2 has not alleviated our concern. There is no requirement for the interim rate-setting process to be more transparent.

Furthermore, unlike the introduction of Bill C-44, there is no information on, or commitment to review, the rate-setting process while section 66 is suspended. In other words, the scope and nature of the review, if any, are unclear.

When the committee met with the various witnesses our awareness of a number of areas was greatly improved. Perhaps I do not have enough time in my 10 minutes to give them all, but I shall try to touch on them briefly.

There was discussion of the seasonal industries, for the truth is that it is the work that is seasonal and not the workers. I can speak with authority on this because my riding depends on tourism, which is a seasonal industry.

When the snow is gone, so are the jobs. People have to wait until the summer tourist season comes along to work in golf clubs and the like.

Between those two seasons, however, they have no work. They go off to apply for employment insurance. They are faced with a two week penalty because every time a person applies he or she has to wait two weeks before drawing maybe a month of benefits. These people return to the labour market for the summer, and with the arrival of fall they are again penalized for two weeks because they apply for employment insurance for three or four weeks while looking for work for the winter.

Is this what these people want? Do we think they go out of their way to get half their salary twice a year for two months? They lose a month's salary, a month of income in their budget. They have to live with that. They have to plan their lives around it. These people depend on this industry. Why are they penalized? This is totally unacceptable.

Do we think that the women working in seasonal industry are happy at losing their spots in day care? Not at all. They have to continue sending their children to day care while they are not working to make sure they do not lose their place. They pay for that.

It is not true that people are encouraged to go on employment insurance. It is totally false. If these people could do without it, they would do a lot better.

There is also the whole issue of self-employed workers. In Quebec there are a lot of small businesses. Elsewhere in Canada too, but primarily in Quebec, a lot of small and medium size businesses have been established.

Self-employed workers have become a fact of life. There were perhaps fewer of them in the past than there are now, but it is a fact of life in Quebec and Canada.

These people often work very hard for long hours and they are not protected by any system. They represent perhaps 18% of the population. That is a lot of people. They would like to be included in the employment insurance plan if possible or in something like it. They want to be part of a plan that would allow them to have employment insurance. They are prepared to pay the money necessary for the protection. They need it just as much as the person working for a business.

• (1120)

This will increasingly be the case in Quebec and in the rest of Canada. These people cannot be excluded. Yet there is absolutely nothing in the bill for them.

Another very important issue for me is the case of young workers. It almost makes no sense to require young workers to work 910 hours. It is absurd. They are penalized because they are part of the labour market. Does the government realize the result of

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this? It leads some employers to abuse, to tell a young person “You better work and do your job, otherwise you will not get employment insurance benefits”.

I could have elaborated on other issues such as the case of pregnant women. Why are pregnant women penalized when a newborn child should be the most wonderful thing that can happen to a family? Pregnant women are being penalized. From now on, women may decide to have children or not based on whether they qualify for employment insurance benefits. Otherwise they will not be able to afford it. This does not make sense.

There is \$35 billion in a fund that belongs to people who have contributed to it throughout their lives but who will not qualify. This is totally absurd.

I would like to end with clause 9. We asked that this clause be deleted. It is the most important one in the bill. It reads:

Notwithstanding section 66, the premium rate for each of the years 2002 and 2003 is the rate set for the year by the Governor in Council on the recommendation of the Minister and the Minister of Finance.

We want that clause deleted. We do not want it. We do not want these people to set the premium rate and to decide who will be entitled to employment insurance benefits.

[English]

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member and understand the major concerns. Having lived in the province of New Brunswick and having grown up there all my life, it hurts when I hear someone refer to our seasonal workers in a negative way.

When this matter was being discussed before, the hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill stated:

Now that he is about to call an election, the Prime Minister has decided to increase EI payments to seasonal workers who already earn a comfortable annual income.

Yesterday the member for Calgary—Nose Hill revealed her party's position on low income seasonal workers when she said again that seasonal workers already earned a comfortable income.

I want to present some figures to the House. In 1996, before the Liberals slashed the EI program, 75% of seasonal workers in New Brunswick made less than \$10,000 a year. How could anyone say they have a comfortable income on \$10,000 a year? Everyone in the House knows that anyone making \$10,000 a year cannot live in a comfortable manner.

As was mentioned by the hon. member from the NDP, over 800,000 people are not eligible for EI. Seasonal workers could be fishermen or lumberjacks. They could work in tourism. They could be construction workers. When the snow comes and the frost hits the ground they are not working.

They want to work. They do not want to sit on their hands, and they do not. Most of them work for the United Way. If their next door neighbour is having a problem, they are right there to help. That is the kind of people there are in the maritime provinces. Hopefully that is the way it is across the whole country.

Because of what has been happening and because of the changes that have negatively impacted on our people back home, a lot of them have had to leave. In the city of Saint John, the largest city in the province, people travel by bus for one hour in the morning to work at one of the fish farms in another county. Because they live in Saint John, New Brunswick, and because the government says our unemployment rate is so low, they pay a higher EI rate. Yet they are working in another county where the rate is lower for the people who live there. That is wrong and needs to be corrected.

• (1125)

Thank God for those men and women who do it because they do not want to be on welfare. They want to show their children and their families that they have their dignity. That is why they do what they do. Our people are like that back home. They want to have dignity. They want to work.

One member in the Bloc mentioned about the independent businessman, that small businessman who is out there. I know about that because my son is one of them.

This past winter a man came to the door of Stephen's TV shop and said that he did not have any money to pay for a TV but he would like to have one. He had not been working for almost six months but wanted the TV for his children for Christmas. My son said that he could have it and asked whether his mother made mincemeat pies. He said yes, his mother made mincemeat pies, that he had deer meat that he could give her to make the pies, and asked whether that would pay for the TV.

They are people who care, who want to go to work. The government has over \$35 billion of their money in its pockets to make the government look good. It says that it will pay down the debt. That money should be in the pockets of men, women and employers who put it there. It should be an independent fund which no one could touch. It should be there for them so that they will have quality lives.

The premiums taken from their paycheques are far too high, yet the government has increased them and reduced the benefits to the people. It has put more money into the bank account.

It tugs at my heart when people come to me and say they want to go to work. It tugs at my heart when I see our shipbuilders, 4,000 men, many of whom are now on welfare. A lot of them are down in Louisiana. The Trudeau government built and put money into the shipyard. The Mulroney government also put money into the shipyard. We have the most modern shipyard anywhere in the world sitting idle.

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We should be building the ships for our military right here, not buying new submarines from London, England, and then spending \$800 million to make them float. We should be doing it through the Davie shipyard and the Saint John shipyard. Those two shipyards built the frigates.

Those men do not know where to go. They do not know where to turn. All they are saying is that they want to contribute to the economy. They want to contribute to Canada. They want to work. They want their dignity. The sooner we give them their dignity, the sooner they will do more in their communities to make a better way of life.

I look at our young people today. We educate them. They want to work where their moms and dads are, where their families, their sisters, their brothers, their nannies and their grampies are. They do not want to have to go away. We do not want them to go away.

A person from Vancouver came to our city market in Saint John. It is the oldest open common market of its kind in Canada. I was walking down the aisle and she came over to me and said that my people were very special, the friendliest people she had ever met. I told her that was the way we were back east. Our people are friendly, outreaching and generous.

When it comes to the commission, the commission should stay in place. The commission should handle the funds. We must get the politics out of the EI fund. We must leave it with that independent commission and then deal with it. The commission is not there to play politics. It has to be there to do what is right. That is why the hon. member from Charlotte county said the commission should remain.

• (1130)

That is why he included the motion. If we do not have the commission we will have politics again. Heaven knows what the men and the employers will be paying for premiums and how little they will have in their pockets to feed their little families.

I say please, every one of us here, let us take the politics out of the bill. Let us do what is right for the man and the woman of Canada, right from Vancouver and the Northwest Territories through to Newfoundland and Labrador. Let us do what is right for our people. Let us all be Canadians today. Let us all be equal in the House of Commons.

Mr. Speaker, I have to tell you for sure that everybody will be watching what the government does with that \$37 billion, which those men and women worked so hard for to put in a bank account where they knew there was security for their future.

I have to say that my party is pleased that the intensity rule will be removed. That rule was wrong and it really hurt. However, we are also saying that the commission must stay in place.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to react to the comments of my colleagues. Before commenting on what my colleagues said about Bill C-2, I wish to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities. As several members across the way have said, thanks to our spirit of co-operation almost all members of the committee recognized the importance of this bill. They also recognized that it was important to pass this bill as quickly as possible in this House and also in the other place.

Having acknowledged this spirit of co-operation in committee, I would also like to clarify certain comments made by my colleagues, especially regarding the motions on Bill C-2 brought forward in the House.

First, Motion No. 4, by my the Bloc Quebecois colleague, proposes to include sickness benefits in the retroactivity period for parents who are going back to work. The government designed this provision after concerns were expressed about the possibility of parents staying at home with their children and going back on the labour market later on.

At present, people are eligible for 15 weeks of sickness benefits. As far as the retroactivity period is concerned, we had promised to introduce Bill C-2 in September. Therefore, a retroactivity cheque will be sent to those eligible as soon as this bill is enacted.

The government is aware of the needs and concerns of Canadians, especially those who are too sick to work. This is why the government has improved access to sickness benefits by reducing from 700 to 600 the number of hours people have to work to be eligible.

Like any member of a government that gives thought to what it does, I, as well as the government and the minister, would like to proceed carefully and understand all aspects of the issue, which is an extremely complex one.

For instance, this system is designed to provide assistance to workers during temporary absences from the labour market. I believe that a decision about the level of support we should offer Canadians who are out of the labour market for an extended period is one which requires a much deeper and comprehensive analysis, one which will probably take in more than the EI system. For instance, assistance is available from the Canada pension plan.

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• (1135)

Benefits from workers compensation programs, as well as the taxation system, also play a role. We should therefore approach this problem comprehensively and this is the direction in which the government is headed.

The second motion, which was deemed debatable here in the House, has to do with the clawback provision, which would not apply to fraudulent claims for benefit weeks. The member who moved this amendment in the House is suggesting that we should be more tolerant of those who defraud the EI system. His proposal would mean that Canadians who made honest claims for benefits would be required to give back a portion of their benefits, while those who made fraudulent claims would be exempt from having to do so.

In effect, the member is suggesting that we introduce an incentive for people to defraud the EI system. I cannot believe that this is the intention of the member who moved this amendment, but it is the potential impact of the amendment if ever it were passed. It is obvious that the government cannot go along with such an amendment to Bill C-2, and we therefore reject it.

Third, I would like to dwell on the famous clause 9 discussed earnestly by several members opposite. The purpose is to delete clause 9 of the bill that would change the way the premium rate is set in relation with the role of the EI commission.

Let us look at the facts. What is the bill saying? It is saying that the government wishes to suspend the commission's role in the determination of the premium rate, but contrary to what my hon. colleague of the Canadian Alliance said, it is not a suspension forever. It is a suspension for a period limited to two years in order to allow the government to review the way the rate is set.

Why are we asking for that? It is because we too happen to follow the advice of the auditor general who, as my hon. colleague said, is well accepted and recognized in this House. We are following the advice of the auditor general who indicated that the premium rate determination process was not clear enough. The Standing Committee on Finance of the House of Commons has also indicated that the mechanism should be reviewed.

It is in the perspective of a review aimed at making the rates fairer that we want to suspend the role of the commission. I repeat that the suspension would be extremely limited and would not exceed a two year period.

The review will deal with rates and premium rate determination. We believe, on the government side, that it is not appropriate to have the commission keep on setting the rates under those conditions. We want to review the system.

[English]

Finally, Motion No. 10, which was proposed by my colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party and also addresses clause 9, would fundamentally change the purpose of clause 9. I would like to remind hon. members that clause 9 relates to the role of the commission in fixing the premium rate.

In fact, as I have just said in French, we are suspending the EI commission's role in rate setting for two years to allow time for the government to review how the rate is set.

Once again I will say in answer to my colleague from the Progressive Conservative that it is the auditor general who suggested that rate setting is not clear enough and hon. members on the other side of the House have said it before. The finance committee has also said that it needs to be revised. I remind all members that the finance committee of the House of Commons is made up of all parties present in the House.

• (1140)

These issues need to be addressed in the review. It is not appropriate to ask the commission to continue to set rates in these circumstances. Therefore, we are suspending their rate setting role while we conduct the review.

[Translation]

Finally, I would like to address an extremely important point that was raised by several members of this House, particularly members of the New Democratic Party and the Bloc Québécois, about the fact that Bill C-2 does not respond to the needs of the people of Canada.

The government has already made the commitment at the standing committee of this House to start examining suggestions made to us by witnesses who appeared before the committee and to make some recommendations to the minister.

However, I would like to quote once again the auditor general, who said to us on February 22, while appearing before the Standing Committee on Public Accounts:

—in the next two years—work will be done on how this should be done in the future. So I think the bill buys some time to come up with a better way of calculating the rates paid by the workers and their employers.

We thus have the support of the auditor general.

Before concluding, I have two other quotations. The first is from Mr. Robert Blakely, director of Canadian affairs, building and construction trades department, AFL-CIO, who said "In general, we support the reforms proposed under Bill C-2".

Another quotation—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I regret to interrupt the parliamentary secretary, but, to be fair to all of our colleagues, I must. The hon. member for St. John's West.

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[English]

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say a few words about this bill, which I look upon as a blackmail bill, to a degree, simply because government is throwing out enough to the people involved to encourage all of us to support the bill, yet is holding back so many other changes that are so necessary we are torn between supporting the bill and voting against it.

However, our party is supporting the bill simply because we in our party know that if we do not accept the changes offered right now, small as they are, those affected may have to wait for prolonged periods, as they did during the fall, of course, when the bill was first introduced. It should have been passed before the election was called but was not and people have suffered decreased incomes throughout this winter.

I congratulate some of the members who spoke this morning. I agree with everything, I think, that was said on this side and I can appreciate exactly where these hon. members are coming from. I especially was impressed with the speech given by my colleague from the NDP who did a magnificent job in outlining some of the concerns his constituents face.

One of the rules that has not been touched at all in this new piece of legislation is the divisor rule. We ask why it has been there from the beginning. If some seasonal employee is fortunate enough to find x number of weeks of work, why should it be divided by a larger number to directly increase his income?

The bill deals with the intensity rule, again a rule that should never have been brought in. It seems the government has been looking at people who are contributing to a fund well in excess of what is required and has been taking money from employers well in excess of what is required, to the extent that we have a surplus of some \$32 billion, instead of asking how we could use this money to help the people who were meant to be helped in the beginning, the people who contribute and the employers who contribute on their behalf. We say to the employers that we will not allow their advisory council to have any say in rate setting. That is how we treat them. We say to the employees that we will try to find as many ways as we can to reduce their benefits. We will increase the number of hours of employment needed to qualify. We will bring in the intensity rule which reduces their payment every year. We will bring in the divisor rule which artificially divides their income. Consequently we end up with 50% of nothing being nothing which is what an awful lot of seasonal employees have been getting over the last few years.

• (1145)

The intensity rule change is a positive one, and we agree with it. We also agree with assisting some people to get back into the

workforce without having the heavy onus of paying in excessive hours.

In relation to the required hours, if we go back, the original changes were brought in to offset what was always referred to as the 10-42 syndrome. People would work 10 weeks, get 15 or 20 hours of work a week and get stamps, as they used to say then, to draw unemployment for the next 42 weeks. Nobody was happy with that system. However it is like everything else the government does. Once it starts swinging the pendulum, it lets it go from one end to the other and the people who suffer in this case are seasonal employees.

We have regions where the economy has been disastrous during the last few years, in particular, the ground fishery in Atlantic Canada. The bottom has fallen right out of it. This not only affects people involved in the fishery, it affects an awful lot of people who work in the processing industry, the fish plants and associated back up activities.

When there is a shortage of resource, as we have seen in recent years, and when we have demands from the market, especially the Japanese market, looking for product that requires little or no processing, the opportunity for the people working in that industry to obtain employment becomes less and less and the hours are fewer and fewer.

We have made no provision to address times of disaster. Earlier in the year I remember some of my colleagues from the Bloc Party talking about people employed in the forest industry. They were having the same problem. When the work was scarce, they had a problem finding the number of hours required.

We do not want to go back to the old 10-42 syndrome, a handful of hours and a person can draw on the employment insurance all year. That is not the case. However there has to be some special provisions made for individuals who live in areas that have been devastated by lack of resource, or slowdowns in the industry, or lack of construction, or major strikes or whatever the case might be. We do not have that flexibility and people are suffering. Ironically, they are suffering while they themselves have contributed to a fund that was supposed to look them, a fund in the amount of \$32 billion which the government lumped in with general revenues.

This is not the way we are supposed to look after the people in our country. This is certainly not the way we are supposed to look after people who really need our help, people who in trying to help themselves get the door slammed in their face.

The bill needs to be amended in several ways and there are amendments on the floor. Certainly, we will be supporting many of them, and perhaps all of them. However amendments should not have been necessary. A government with a conscience, a government that is supposed to know what is going on should have brought in a full bill to deal with all the issues. It is not enough to

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placate a few and bribe politicians into supporting it so that these people will at least have some benefits, while completely rejecting other benefits that are necessary.

• (1150)

Let us talk about the EI funding and the Department of Human Resources Development. There are provinces which have a lot of seasonal workers. This in itself creates high unemployment in those areas. These people are looking for work and asking government to help out. At the same time we see the end of March approaching, which is the fiscal year end.

Some provinces use the word dump, which in this case means millions of dollars from small, poor provinces are being dumped back into government coffers because of the tight reins the government has on local offices. The flexibility is not there to deliver even the meagre amounts that are assigned to the various regions. It is amazing.

For the first half of this year and part of the previous year, most of the employees of HRDC were busy trying to correct mistakes of the past as a result of the looseness of the government. With the reduction in staff in the department, the manpower was not there to educate people on what was involved in putting forward good, solid proposals which could generate activity in the communities and create employment.

The local offices have been hammered by their own department. What happened? Through no fault of their own, they have not been able to deliver the funds available. Money has been sent back to government. It is unheard of.

It is time the government become aware of what is happening, especially in the rural areas. Somebody mentioned today that small communities adjacent to bigger ones have been lumped together. The small communities are paying the price because they live near areas of high employment.

All of these things have to be looked at. Hopefully we will see changes before the final vote and will be only too glad to see such changes occur.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my speech by asking a question, and I am sure the answer will be yes.

I would imagine that you are quite familiar with the works of Jean de La Fontaine. I see that you are nodding your approval. I am convinced that everyone in the House knows Jean de La Fontaine, a famous French poet who lived from 1621 to 1695. He is particularly well known all over the world for his *Fables*.

If Jean de La Fontaine were still living today, he would find that the ideal conditions, the winning conditions for writing a new fable, are all brought together in the employment insurance plan. Let me explain.

When Jean de La Fontaine personified an animal, he did it for two very specific reasons. First, it underlines human and social behaviours and helps us understand how they work. Second, it is a means by which to draw attention to the sensitivity and intelligence of animals that should at times be a source of inspiration for us. We would be better off. I can easily imagine a fable he could have entitled the nasty chickens and the nice geese”.

Mr. Speaker, just like me, you were once small, even though it does not show any more, and young. When I was a child there was a tradition which still exists. At Easter, my brothers would go out and buy cute little chicks. Spring being the time of renewal, of rebirth, we used to love to buy these animals.

I was six or seven years younger than my brothers. Who do you think had to feed the chickens every morning? Me, of course.

• (1155)

As time went by, the chickens got bigger. However, I had noticed that one was a bit smaller than the others. I wondered what was happening. I began to observe it. I realized that the smaller chicken was excluded by the others until one day it finally died. We know how it is when one chicken is weaker than the others. They begin pecking at it and hurt it until it dies. That is the first part of the fable.

Here is the second part. I was a little older at that time. My brothers took me fishing and hunting. One day, they showed me a flight of Canada geese. We know that these birds travel over fairly long distances. We also know how it is with Canada geese. When one of them becomes too weak or too tired, the strongest goose will go just under it and support it in flight. When that goose gets tired another one takes its place, and in the end the weak goose reaches its destination.

We saw that nasty chickens exclude whereas nice geese include. That is a very good illustration of how EI works at present.

It is pretty serious business to lose a job. People have responsibilities. They feel helpless. Then the nasty chickens come along to peck at them. Here we have someone who has lost a job. What is the first question we ask? “Eligible or not eligible?” Then we pick, pick, pick away at eligibility. We make sure that the rules are as strict as possible. If we find a person is eligible that bugs us, so we pick, pick, pick away again, adding the two week waiting period. Tactics of exclusion are constantly being used.

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At one point benefits were 60% of earnings. We say that is too much, so we pick away some more and bring it down to 55%. Then we pick away again at the seasonal workers because they apply every year and reduce benefits by 1% per year. The institutional tactic of exclusion is obvious. I could go on, in fact I will.

Construction workers are also seasonal workers. They have to be looking for work, however. The department says that construction workers who go through their unions, their construction board where all the available jobs are posted, are not considered to have been looking for work. We are picking away again.

Then there are the young workers, women who are excluded from eligibility, parental leave. Earlier in my introduction I spoke of spring, which is a call to life. A man and a woman who decide to have a child are again virtually excluded. They are not eligible under the terms of employment insurance. If the expectant mother has to make use of preventive withdrawal from the workplace, here there is another exclusion. In this employment insurance system, it is exclusion from A to Z.

Then, there are the older workers. It is certainly difficult when a person is 55 and has been in one job for 35 years. Here again we exclude them. Assistance programs which could help them until retirement are taken away. As far as I know, there was a commitment to reinstate such a program. It has not yet appeared. Once again exclusion is the rule.

• (1200)

Basically the Bloc Québécois and the opposition believe that we are doing what we are doing because of what we are. We are the nice geese.

If for some reason someone is going through hard times, such as the loss of a job, there must be some system somewhere to help him, to support him until he gets back on his feet.

All the amendments brought forward by my colleagues in the Bloc Québécois and other colleagues in the opposition are along that line. We do not want the employment insurance system to be exclusive. We want it to be an inclusive plan.

We could go on for hours about various issues. We could add amendments. However now they are restricting debate partially in this case, but it will probably come to total closure very soon.

I am sure Jean de La Fontaine would have been delighted to write a fable about the nasty chickens and the nice geese. This does not only apply to employment insurance. We could also apply it to federalism and sovereignty.

There are nasty chickens that are leading us, the nice geese, to support sovereignty in Quebec. We want a nation that once it fully controls its own employment insurance fund will be able to include

persons who are going through hard times so that they are not excluded from society but are helped and can later return to society with pride and dignity, thanks to the assistance they received from support programs, just like a nice goose would do.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): That was a fairly picturesque speech. The hon. member for Windsor—St. Clair.

[*English*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—St. Clair, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise to reiterate the points made by my colleague from the Progressive Conservative Party about the inadequacies of the legislation being proposed, specifically the short list of the amendments and changes that would be made, depending upon the outcome of the vote. Many more issues need to be addressed and I will draw them to the attention of the House at this time.

One issue that has been of particular import to my riding in the last few months is the change concerning the 85% rule that is required in one of the regulations under the act. It establishes that if an employee does not return to work in a strike lockout situation, the reason must be because of lack of work and not because of lack of work or production generated as a result of the strike lockout.

The rule is wide open to abuse on the part of employers if after the strike lockout they wish to be vindictive. The offensive part of the regulation is that the employer is the one who is sought out and asked for information on whether the 85% rule is being met.

I wish to make a side point here. The 85% rule is not only with regard to 85% of the employees being called back to work but also 85% of production being restored. It is a double opportunity for the employer to have the final decision on whether individual employees will qualify. We had two recent situations in Windsor where this specific situation arose.

The interesting part is that as a result of work done by the CAW union and my office, the department reversed the original decision disqualifying all those workers. Literally hundreds of them were disqualified. I still have not had a response from the minister in terms of the interpretation placed on the rule, but there seems to be some policy where during certain periods of time the rule is not enforced. Our party's position is that the rule should be done away with completely. The general application of the act and the regulations should flow once a strike lockout situation has terminated.

• (1205)

Another concern I have, and one that I run across in my riding repeatedly, is with one of the penalties under the legislation. It is in regard to individuals who know that they will be unemployed and they make arrangements in all good faith to seek retraining.

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The government is actively pressing individuals who are unemployed to upgrade themselves. It constantly publishes figures about the need for people to recognize that in the course of their working career they will be repeatedly required to return to some educational or retraining program in order to maintain full employment.

In spite of the figures that we have all seen, and the position that the government is taking, individuals who wish to return to work by way of upgrading their skills and knowing that they will need to do that in order to get favourable employment situations, are in effect penalized by being required to go without employment benefits for a full two week period. They leave the workforce, usually not voluntarily, and then they are without any form of income for a full two weeks while in an educational program.

It is particularly offensive to single parent families with children who rely on that income to have a waiting period of two weeks. It has a very negative effect, particularly for women in the workforce, as it forces them to go on social service benefits rather than get the retraining that they really require. Retraining would be much better for them as it would enhance the overall economy and it would be good of society. That is another change that is required and we see no signs of the government moving on it.

My final point deals with the inaction on the part of the government to deal with the taking of the money that has been paid for by both employees and employers to the tune of \$35 billion. It has also refused to even acknowledge a responsibility to replace those funds.

If the government returned those funds, there is no question that the amount the employer or employee would have to contribute would be significantly reduced. We need those funds available in case of a significant economic downturn, which we may be confronting at this period of time.

We need action on the part the government on each one of those items. As Bill C-2 and the proposed amendments show, we are not getting it at this time.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am always very interested in talking about the employment insurance bill.

• (1210)

I have to say that I opposed the bill. I opposed it and I still oppose it, but a little less today because now I have hope.

I will first explain why the Bloc Québécois and I oppose this bill as currently defined. First off, clause 9 of the bill gives the government the power to set the premium rates for 2002 and 2003,

on the recommendation of the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Finance.

Under the existing act the premium rates are set by the commission, with the approval of the governor in council, on the recommendation of the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Finance.

The nuance is significant since with the ousting of the commission for the rate setting process the rates could be adjusted according to the needs of the government and its deficit, rather than according to the needs of the unemployed and the amount of contributions received, as the chief actuary recommends.

If passed, clause 9 would legalize theft and the government's having full possession of the fund.

This morning people talked about a real employment insurance fund. However, with clause 9, we are making it legal for the government to draw from the fund surplus as it wishes. I therefore appeal to this government to have this clause repealed. If it were, I would vote in favour. The Bloc Québécois would vote for the bill. Why?

If members read over my last speech concerning Bill C-2, they will find that I was very critical of that bill, which had nothing to do with the reality of the area I represent where seasonal work is a fact of life.

Why am I less critical today? It is because I have hope. Nevertheless, I remain concerned. I have hope, given the fact that a motion was adopted by the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development which was put forward by the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques and which said:

That the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities report to the House of Commons other recommendations related to the Employment Insurance Act and that this report be tabled to the House no later than June 1, 2001.

Hearings were held and people from Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean gave testimony before the committee. We were very happy about that. Several witnesses said that the actual reform was nonsense since it does not answer the needs of our fellow citizens.

I am still concerned today, but I see a glimmer of hope. What will be the content of the report tabled on June 1? I do not know. However my colleague from Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques has all my confidence, because he is a man full of compassion and understanding toward Quebec workers. There are many things I would like to see in this report, and I hope it can generate major changes in the present plan.

The Employment Insurance Act as it stands now has a negative impact on my region and that of the hon. member for Charlevoix,

because we both experienced the same kind of situation on July 1. This is not a problem affecting all our colleagues.

The act provides for a review of EI zones every five years. The number of hours and the number of weeks of benefits vary between an area with high unemployment and an area with a strong economy.

• (1215)

When the zoning is sensibly done it reflects the reality of regions. A new zone was established on July 1 last year without any real consultation. There were token consultations. I wrote to the minister to tell her I disagreed with this new EI zone. In Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean her officials told her to keep the status quo. In spite of it all, the chief actuary established the new zone. Actually I do not know whether the actuary or the minister was involved, but that is not relevant. Still, a major change was made in that instead of having to work 420 hours to qualify workers from the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region will now need 525 hours to get a maximum of 22 weeks of benefits, instead of 31.

This may be of little significance to us, in the comfort of our seats. This morning, I listened to the passionate speech made by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst on the realities experienced by the families and workers who will not qualify, or who will qualify but will only receive benefits until February. How will these people survive? From February to May when the tourist season starts and seasonal economic activities resume, these people will have to rely on income security, on welfare.

Do hon. members think this is what these people want? Absolutely not, particularly since they often have a house or a car, which is perfectly normal and something I wish on everyone. Because of that they cannot qualify for provincial income security. These people then find themselves without any income, and governments wonder why people turn to the underground economy. There comes a point where people have to get into survival mode. When the government comes up with measures like this one, with measures that do not reflect the workers' reality, some turn to the underground economy because they need to put bread and butter on the table.

That is why the minister, faced with an outcry from workers in our regions before the election was called, agreed to change the rules to propose transitional measures so that workers would have the time, the minister put it, to get used to the new EI rules which restrict eligibility and decrease the number of benefit weeks.

People do not get used to poverty. Even if we wanted to extend the tourism season, and we are working on it, the weather must be factored in. When the ground is frozen it is frozen, with the result that there are certain activities which are impossible during the winter season. Seasonal work is a reality in this country and must be taken into consideration.

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I mentioned earlier that I hoped the committee would submit a report and that it would lead to amendments so that the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and North Shore regions would see a return to measures reflecting the economic reality of the Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean area. The result would be that seasonal workers could make both ends meet and that they would not find themselves facing poverty. This does not mean that they do not want to work. Far from it.

Once again, I listened to the speech by the member for Acadie—Bathurst who had heard in the House that some people are lazy and want to live off income security. There may be a percentage who do, but it is not true of most workers. Far from it. What people want are working conditions, work and decent pay, to which everyone is entitled.

If the existing rules are not amended the impact on the economy of my region and on businesses will be disastrous.

• (1220)

I mentioned workers who will face a gap in benefits in the spring. Businesses will be affected as well.

Unfortunately that is all the time I have.

Mr. Gérard Asselin (Charlevoix, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased today to speak to Bill C-2 which really hurts seasonal workers.

During the election campaign the Prime Minister claimed loud and clear throughout Quebec that as soon as he was back in office in Ottawa his government would undertake an in-depth reform of the EI plan.

In some regions Canadian voters believed him and in others they did not. In the Gaspé peninsula people believed that the Prime Minister, having finally wiped out the deficit, was promising in his red book to completely overhaul the EI plan.

The citizens of the Gaspé and the islands were fooled again. They were wrong in voting Liberal, even if the Liberal member made a heartfelt appeal to the Prime Minister during the campaign, asking him to finally listen and keep the election promises he had personally made.

The Prime Minister will not be easily moved by the heartfelt cry from my colleague from Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok. The Prime Minister has been in politics for 35 years. He has seen and done all kinds of things. He made promises and even acknowledged that he was mistaken when he had seasonal workers, women and students pitch in to help wipe out the deficit by cutting their EI benefits from 55% to 50%. This had a double effect.

The Prime Minister thought these cuts in their benefits would encourage them to improve their skills and work longer.

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Several members mentioned that in several areas of Quebec such as Charlevoix and the North Shore there were a lot of seasonal jobs. Workers would like to have permanent jobs. Employers would like to be able to give them permanent jobs. As we know, if employers cannot guarantee a high enough number of hours of work to allow workers to qualify for employment insurance benefits, they tend to leave. It is very expensive for employers to have to constantly train new workers for these seasonal jobs.

Bill C-44 was on the table before the election campaign. The Prime Minister promised an in-depth reform when parliament reconvened. He introduced Bill C-2. Bill C-2 is a photocopy of Bill C-44. If Bill C-44 was not acceptable, Bill C-2 is even less so because again it does not meet the commitments made by the government during the election campaign. The government was re-elected on these promises.

It would take some major changes right away. There was no need for Bill C-2 to go through all the stages: introduction and first reading, second reading, committee review to hear witnesses, back to the House for third reading and finally royal assent. I am convinced the Prime Minister would have had the unanimous consent of the House, of both government and opposition members, to split Bill C-2 into two separate parts.

We would have unanimously agreed to it if only the government had promised to immediately and retroactively give back all the money it took from the unemployed through the intensity rule, to bring in an increase from 50% to 55% to eliminate the clawback effect, and to bring in an increase from \$28,000 to \$38,000 to allow mothers to stay on maternity leave instead of being unemployed for two or four years. We would have agreed unanimously to split the bill.

• (1225)

The government would have also made the commitment to proceed to a true reform of the employment insurance plan. The Prime Minister knows what a true reform of the EI plan is, and so do the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Finance since there was such a reform in 1996, the Axworthy reform, when drastic cuts were made to the plan.

In 1996, when the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and the then Minister of Human Resources Development decided to reform the EI plan, their goal was to take in as much as possible and give out as little as possible. With eligibility requirements set at 910 hours, six persons out of ten who paid EI contributions were not eligible for benefits.

The need is in our ridings but the money is in Ottawa. The unemployed need the money but the Minister of Finance has it in his pockets. Of course the intensity rule made no sense at all. The

Prime Minister recognized that fact following a question from the Bloc Québécois and undertook to review the rule and change it. However we are asking for a lot more than that.

At least 60 to 70 witnesses came to say unanimously to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities that Bill C-2 did not go far enough. The two week waiting period should also be abolished. We know that employment insurance is an insurance that employees and employers pay into in case there is a job loss or termination. It is part of the social benefits.

It is not because people apply for EI benefits that they must be penalized with a two week waiting period. Why keep the 910 hour requirement for seasonal workers? Whether they are temporary or part time employees, these people pay premiums and never receive benefits.

A seasonal worker status should be recognized. This would prevent regions from quarrelling among themselves. This would also somewhat prevent businesses, employers and employees from being in a difficult situation compared to others.

On the ferry, the boat belonging to the Société des traversiers du Québec which sails between Baie Sainte-Catherine and Tadoussac in my riding, I have seen Tadoussac and Baie Sainte-Catherine residents who did not have the same EI coverage. This is illogical because they have the same employer.

Also, when a seasonal employee was lucky enough to get some work in the last two or three years, he needed 420 hours to qualify for 32 insurable weeks. The minister wants to come back with her project in 2003-04. However this is done increasingly. In 2000-01, today, 420 hours are required to qualify for 32 weeks. In 2001-02 someone will have to work 420 hours to qualify for 28 weeks. Already next year four weeks will be cut. In 2002-03 it will be 455 hours for 24 weeks and in 2003-04 525 hours for 21 weeks.

At this time of year, at the end of March, we will be reading in the papers or hearing on the TV that according to Statistics Canada the unemployment rate has dropped in Quebec and Canada. Why has the unemployment rate dropped? It is because people are no longer covered by employment insurance. The government is not paying money out any more. It is paying out a lot less. Statistics Canada says the unemployment rate has dropped. It is not because people have entered the labour market. It is because they no longer get employment insurance cheques. At this point it is something like the principle of communicating vessels.

If people do not get EI cheques social assistance goes up. Who pays for social assistance? The workers do, through their taxes. The workers of Quebec pay for this assistance which provides some income security.

Thirty-six billion dollars have been in the government coffers since the 1996 reform. Six people in ten are not entitled to EI. The needs are in ridings and the money is in Ottawa. The unemployed need money, and the money is in the Minister of Finance's pockets.

• (1230)

There have been multiple demonstrations, at least 10,000 signatures on petitions—I have tabled some 10—and meetings with native communities, unions, Charlevoix—Côte-Nord coalitions in an effort to appeal to the minister. We almost had to wring her arm to get a meeting.

She promised a bill, training and programs, but unfortunately the transitional measures were empty because there is no money in the program.

In closing, we want a thorough reform by the government as soon as possible, because the unemployed have been penalized enough by Liberal government reforms.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak about Bill C-2 and the whole employment insurance saga.

We know that the reforms in the employment insurance program have made victims and that some people cannot collect insurance benefits any more when they lose their job.

Today we are asking for real action. We are asking for a real reform that will give more people access to employment insurance. Six people in ten are currently excluded. Such an insurance should allow any worker who loses his or her job to collect employment insurance benefits, but it is not the case any more since the 1996 reform of the employment insurance program.

Some changes were introduced through various bills, including Bill C-44 which only brought minor improvements. I cannot understand how the government could not respond to people's expectations. Our committee had several meetings to look at a real in-depth reform of the employment insurance bill. We have heard groups that were very representative of the population.

The Bloc Québécois went on a few fact finding tours to try and understand what was happening in the various areas, what impact this unfair and unwarranted reform was having. It has already hurt many, people who could not find work in time to go back to work within a reasonable time frame. We were talking about the spring gap. Many seasonal workers do not qualify for EI because their insurable period has been shortened.

Before the elections they were talking about true employment insurance reform, but now they are back with Bill C-2. It does not go far enough. It will hurt the unemployed without really overhauling the system.

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Our critic on human resources development, the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, has really worked hard in committee. He is very familiar with this issue. After listening to the concerns of the various witnesses, he came back with amendments to the overall Employment Insurance Act and asked the government to consider them.

About 60 organizations appeared before the committee to talk about the reality faced by the unemployed, by all those who lose their jobs and can no longer qualify. The legislation limits access to EI benefits. The Bloc Québécois is bringing forward all the changes he has been asking for. The Bloc's concern is not new. This has been an issue for the Bloc ever since 1993, because we are very much aware of the hardship faced by the people who were discriminated against because they cannot qualify.

We can also talk about eliminating the waiting period, something that was set to target workers who were claiming UI benefits too often. They were not doing so out of malice but because they were unable to find work.

• (1235)

We know that the 1996 reform, which was unprecedented in this government, made it even harder for workers to qualify. Those who used EI too often were penalized and saw their benefit rate reduced by as much as 5%.

During those five years recipients could no longer get benefits at a rate of 55% of insurable earnings since they could lose up to 50% of their benefit rate.

Why are we calling for the establishment of a separate employment insurance fund? It is because what is happening right now is unacceptable. The government is dipping into the EI fund. It is doing it to eliminate the deficit, which makes it look like a government that has a lot of money to hand out in grants to friends of the party or in grants with no particular objective in terms of helping the unemployed.

We know there is \$36 billion in the EI fund today. We could have a separate fund administered by those who contribute to it, namely workers and employers. That fund must be managed separately.

We are calling for an increase in insurable earnings from 55% to 60% to respond to the rising cost of living. Right now the rate is 55%. This increase is totally justified to give the unemployed slightly higher benefits to help them make ends meet while they look for a job.

We are requesting a change in the definition of the rate calculation period from 26 weeks to 52 weeks. At present, those who qualify are few and they have fewer weeks of insurable employment.

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The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord keeps saying that we should be fair with the regions. Often workers in some areas depend on seasonal or unstable jobs. Twenty-six weeks is clearly not enough in a context where there may not be any jobs available.

Another serious change we would like to see is the insurability of independent workers through a voluntary plan. Had the reform of employment insurance been tailored to the needs of the labour market, an assessment of the impact on independent workers would have been made.

I also know, because I was told about it, that the cultural industry should have been taken into consideration. Human resources people in the cultural industry have formed a coalition, asking for a pilot project for cultural workers. These are very often independent workers, with incomes at or below the poverty level. That is another aspect of the labour market which has not been taken into account.

We wanted to bring down to 300 hours the eligibility requirement for special benefits. In some areas those who want to take a maternal or parental leave with special benefits, or those who are sick, have to work more hours. They need 600 hours before they qualify for EI benefits.

We would like to bring that figure down to 300 hours. In some areas workers need 420 hours to be eligible. It is unacceptable that people who experience very special conditions cannot be treated just like other workers.

• (1240)

Concerning the increase in the duration of benefits I believe that if we do not take into account what is really going on in the field, some people will find themselves without any EI benefits and that their duration is too insignificant to meet their needs.

Harmonizing to 25% the earnings of all claimants before EI benefits are cut, this is a main theme of the Bloc Québécois. Members can be assured that all the reforms asked for by the Bloc are shared by all the people who testified before the committee on human resources development and the status of people with disabilities.

Insurable yearly earnings must be indexed and raised to \$41,500.

I think the government has a lot of work to do to correct this inequity going back to the 1996 reform, which resulted in several poverty level people having to apply for welfare. Finally, the provincial governments had to step in and take over the federal government's responsibility.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to address the bill before us today.

Let me begin by saying that in my opinion the employment insurance issue has evolved somewhat, but in a negative way. Let me explain.

There was a time when the federal government contributed to the employment insurance fund, then called the unemployment insurance fund, to the tune of about 25%. Of course the rest of the money came from employers and workers. All of a sudden in the 1980s, the government said "We will no longer contribute to the employment insurance fund. We will no longer put in our 25%. From now on all the money will come from employers and workers".

A number of economic and financial studies have shown that our businesses have since lost a degree of competitiveness, because they must make greater contributions to the employment insurance fund.

That decision has been a costly one. At the same time that the government was withdrawing from the plan in the 1980s a number of bills were introduced to make it harder for people to qualify for benefits. Before these changes seven or eight people in ten who would lose their jobs would qualify for EI benefits, compared to only four now.

The federal government is putting less money into the fund. In fact, it is not putting any and it is tightening eligibility rules and a whole set of other rules, which my colleague described very well. These will, if I understand correctly, be raised before the House on June 1, 2001, when the standing committee tables a report.

The rules were tightened and made stricter. The government withdrew and contributed less money while at the same time wanting more control. Hon. members will tell me there is nothing new about that. That is more or less what the federal government has been doing for several years. It wants to contribute less and less but to centralize more and more.

This has had repercussions. In my riding of Saint-Jean a PSAC survey has shown clearly that Saint-Jean was losing \$21 million yearly because of all the restrictions relating to employment insurance: restrictions on eligibility, on the number of weeks, on what the federal government contributes. Saint-Jean has received \$21 million less than it did under the generous, previous plan.

Saint-Jean is not alone. In all ridings of Quebec and all ridings of Canada similar things have been happening. As a result, people losing their jobs have found themselves dependent on provincial welfare once they were no longer eligible for employment insurance.

I hardly need point out that Ottawa has also reduced the amounts earmarked for transfer payments to the provinces for health, education and social assistance. Thus the provinces are hit with exorbitantly heavy costs.

• (1245)

Why are we against this bill at the moment? It is because of clause 9. If the government agreed to delete clause 9 there would be no problem. Under the current legislation the premium rate is set by the Employment Insurance Commission on the recommendation of the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Finance.

The bill before us goes further. The Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Finance will make their recommendations directly to the government. They will no longer have to go through the commission. As I was saying earlier, the government no longer contributes to the EI fund. This means that from now on there is a great risk that the decisions made by the department, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Human Resources Development in terms of setting the premium rate will be based on government needs.

A lot of people question the legitimacy of a fund like the one we now have, with a \$6 to \$7 billion a year surplus for a cumulative total of about \$25 billion over the last few years, when that money is used for purposes other than the one for which it was intended, namely helping people who lose their jobs.

There is a major problem with clause 9 and we cannot agree to it. Many people have criticized this clause. In Quebec businesses and employers have spoken out against this because they have realized that they are now paying more without getting anything out of it, practically. They know that by paying more surpluses are building up in Ottawa and that part of what they are paying is used by the government to meet its own needs, which is not what the EI fund was designed to do.

Employees who pay premiums every week have come to the same conclusion. They are saying that it does not only provide a safety net for those who lose their jobs. They understand that with what the government is taking out of the fund it can pay back its debts or inject money in its daily operations.

There is a big problem. If the government could come to terms with this issue and say that it will forget about clause 9 and leave it up to the commission to set the rate, then it could have the support of the Bloc Quebecois. Until it change its mind, it will have to do without our support.

I also want to commend our colleague for making a list of very specific items that are not in the bill but that will eventually have to be considered. Let me review some of them. There is the elimination of the waiting period, which is very important to us. During the 1998 ice storm in my riding of Saint-Jean people who had paid EI premiums all their lives and were laid off when their employers had

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to close shop because they were out of power were told "You have to wait two weeks". I thought that was too much. These people had been paying in all their lives and needed these benefits, but the federal government had found a way to turn them down.

The way I see it, it is not an employee's fault when there are no longer any jobs. Employment insurance is a safety net. The only purpose I can see for the government in a waiting period is to ensure a supply of additional funds or fewer expenditures.

It is the same with the creation of older workers' benefits. Since the government wrapped up the POWA program, which was designed to help older workers, we have had terrible problems in our ridings. People regularly come to my office telling me "Listen, I am 55 or 58, and I swear to you that when I apply for work people look at me in an odd way and I never get an interview". This is only normal. Employers are going to select from a much younger pool. They feel that even though older workers have accumulated a lot of experience, they will not be with the company as long. They do not tell them "We are not going to hire you". They say "We are sorry, but we have selected someone else. We are not able to hire you, but we will keep your name on file".

Be that as it may, these people are unable to find another job, and this causes a problem. This is one of the things that must be looked at a little later on, I imagine, when the standing committee submits its report on June 1. For now, there are a whole series of issues that have not been resolved. One of these is the benefit rate. It is now 55% instead of the 60% it used to be.

• (1250)

This is part of what I was saying earlier, that the government has tightened and tightened in order to go on increasing its surpluses for its own needs. This is something that is difficult to accept.

I appeal to the government's sense of reason. If it wants the support of the Bloc Quebecois, all it has to do is delete clause 9 and arrange things so that the commission, which sets premium rates on the recommendation of the two ministers, is maintained, so that it at least avoids the appearance of the government wanting to help itself to the fund.

If the government withdraws clause 9 the Bloc Quebecois would be pleased to support Bill C-2.

[English]

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak during report stage of Bill C-2 and in particular to address my remarks to the amendments the House is now dealing with.

The perspective I bring to the Chamber this afternoon is one of equality for women and parents. In my view if one addressed and

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analyzed the bill from the point of view of gender fairness and non-discrimination it would fail the test.

I have, as do I think many others in the House, a question for the government. Was a gender analysis done for the bill? Were the concerns of Canadians about the discriminatory features of the existing Employment Insurance Act addressed in preparation for Bill C-2?

It would seem that on every count and in every instance the government has failed to address those concerns and has perpetuated the enormous inequalities and discriminatory features of the act and of the legislation before us.

We have raised before in the House our concerns about the changes introduced by the government in 1997. We have raised the concern that the government has taken important revenue away from workers and unemployed Canadians to deal with its preoccupation of balancing the budget and addressing the debt and deficit.

We had hoped, in this time of surplus and given the intentions of the government to redress its previous mistakes, that the bill would be a step forward. Unfortunately that is not the case.

It is a particularly sad day for us to be here addressing the bill when at this very moment and as we speak a charter challenge is being heard in the courts. It is a charter challenge that could have been avoided had the government put its money where its mouth was. If it had adhered to and respected its own rhetoric the challenge would not be before the courts today.

The witnesses and testimonies for the charter challenge were heard on February 19. It is expected that we will soon hear the results of the challenge. All expectations are that it will be successful and that the government will need to deal with the situation. It will need to deal with its neglect in terms of equality for women, part time workers and parents.

I acknowledge the work and contribution to the country by the Community Unemployed Help Centre of Winnipeg, which has taken up the challenge and supported a woman by the name of Kelly Lesiuk in her charter challenge.

Following the 1997 changes, the Community Unemployed Help Centre of Winnipeg surveyed organizations and individuals to determine how the act might be improved. It heard very clearly from participants that the present act was having a profound effect on workers with the most tenuous attachment to the labour force, including part time workers, new entrants and re-entrants.

The people who responded to the survey felt that unless the government addressed those concerns a charter challenge was perfectly in order and that there was incredible merit for such a case.

• (1255)

Kelly Lesiuk, a part time nurse from Winnipeg, came forward with her situation. I will describe her case briefly so members can see how the act and the bill before us fail to address a fundamental right and freedom in our society.

Kelly Lesiuk worked part time for five years while also raising a child. When Kelly's husband found alternate employment in Winnipeg the family moved from Brandon, Manitoba and were faced with a difficult situation. Kelly was five months pregnant with her second child. She applied for employment insurance in Winnipeg. It was her justifiable expectation to obtain regular EI benefits while seeking employment. She expected that when she was no longer able to work she could switch her claim to maternity and then to parental benefit.

Needless to say, the Lesiuks were shocked to find that Kelly failed to qualify for benefits because she had fallen 33 hours short of the 700 hours required at the time of her application. As Kelly said in an interview in the spring of 1999:

To make it through, we've had to deplete our savings, RRSPs, max out our credit cards and borrow money. I have had to return to work just six weeks after having my baby boy by cesarean section. The safety net that we felt was there for us was not.

Kelly is not alone in the situation she experienced. Hundreds of other women, part time workers and parents are in similar situations. Some 60 other cases based on similar circumstances are waiting to be heard pending the final word on the charter challenge.

It is a shame that women like Kelly must go through such a lengthy legal process. It is a shame that when the government had an opportunity to act so many other women are left waiting to hear how things will unfold.

We are dealing with a failure on the part of the government to address a systemic problem. The government and society must recognize that today women represent 70% of part time workers. That means they bear a disproportionate negative impact under the government's approach to employment insurance. They are the hardest hit by the Liberals' rules on employment insurance.

To drive home the point, let us remember that seven out of ten unemployed women have no access to benefits. Let us also remind ourselves that only 15% of young women now qualify for employment insurance. Finally, let us recognize that only half of women who give birth receive maternity benefits under existing EI rules. This is because so many women are in part time, temporary or on call contracts that the government cannot meet the requirements.

It would have been very important for the government at this opportune moment to address those concerns and bring forward appropriate amendments to ensure there is no discriminatory

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impact on women in our society today. For goodness' sake, we are in the year 2001.

For some 30 years women and women's movements across Canada have been fighting for legislation that has no gender bias. They have been fighting for pay equity, recognition under employment insurance rules and fair treatment with respect to pensions.

Women have asked the government over and over again to ensure that every law is looked at from the point of view of its impact on women and that every proposal before the House comes with a gender based analysis. There could not have been a gender based analysis with respect to this bill, or we would not be here today talking about its impact on women. It is a matter of acting on the facts.

• (1300)

In conclusion, the government has talked a lot about equality and about redressing the problems it created through its changes to the Employment Insurance Act in 1997. This is the moment and the opportune time to make those changes.

We have a bill before us that could correct both problems and ensure that women, particularly women who work part time and women who continue to have the primary responsibility for the raising of children, are not discriminated against by actions of the government. That is the fair, the just and the right thing to do.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Madam Speaker, I would like to bring to your attention the fact that with regard to this debate dealing with the status of women, among other things, there are still only a few of us in the House to advance the status of women.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the House, not out of some mean-spiritedness, that every time there is a major debate in the House on women's issues I see very few women rising on the other side. Instead I see quite a few men. This saddens me a little.

I had not planned to take part in today's debate on EI. I will be speaking off the cuff, straight from the heart. This is a unique opportunity for me to raise the awareness of members of this House on the impact of some of the provisions of the Employment Insurance Act on the living conditions of women.

On the weekend and again on Monday and Tuesday, I was fortunate to take part in a national forum on birth and rebirth. It dealt with the time in the life of a woman between the moment when she becomes pregnant and 18 or 24 months after the birth of her child. The lack of tools available to women to escape poverty when they have a child was among the topics discussed.

Another topic was how through the whole process women find themselves isolated from everyone except perhaps the father. Quite often fathers, and increasingly so with young fathers, are present and involved. However, when we talk about single parent, people with children living in poverty, we are talking about women. When we talk about precarious jobs, we are talking about women.

We know that 70% of precarious jobs, and probably even more, are held by women. They bear the brunt of precarious employment. Of course when they have not worked enough hours to qualify for EI benefits they do not get any. What do they do? That is the question.

I am also thinking about self-employed women. Often women have been taken for a ride in this whole situation. They are often told "Become self-employed, work at home and you will be able to care for your children at the same time". However self-employed women are not eligible for employment insurance benefits and they will not have access to parental leave either, because there is nothing about that in the bill. Moreover, they often do not make enough money to be eligible.

Last weekend, I was very surprised to find out that there is a committee of mothers who are being denied their maternity and parental leave. It is true. I have the brochure right here.

• (1305)

These women decided to form a group a few years ago because they are not eligible for leave or benefits. They asked that changes be made to the Employment Insurance Act. I hope the committee in charge of reviewing the EI plan heard them. Everything revolves around the eligibility criterion and the extension of parental leave.

It is a good thing that the government was able to take this eligibility criterion into account. It helps a little, except that when the benefit period was extended some of the negative effects were ignored. Some workers are not eligible. I will give an example and I will try to be very specific because it is a complex situation.

For example, a pregnant woman who is on preventive withdrawal because her health or the baby's health is in danger and who receives benefits from the CSST is not eligible for EI benefits. That is a delicate situation.

These women are penalized because they received money from the CSST. They are penalized because they used preventive withdrawal to ensure their safety and the safety of their unborn baby. In doing that they cannot accumulate the required number of hours to qualify for maternity or parental leave.

They are denied benefits; they are denied their rights. They are forced to choose, which I think is totally unacceptable. I believe this puts the government in a very awkward position.

The government says "We will help mothers because we believe the first years of life are the most important. We will help parents get closer to their children". What about the women who cannot

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get employment insurance benefits and who are not entitled to parental leave? They are forced to go back to work.

Fortunately in Quebec we have a child care program. It helps a little. It offers support, but day care centres will never replace parents. The mother has a choice to make. She either takes parental leave at her own expense or she goes back to work. It is one of the bad elements.

I will give another example. In the former Employment Insurance Act a woman was entitled to collect employment insurance benefits from the moment she had delivered the baby or at the expected time of delivery. The new act now says that a woman who has delivered a baby on or after January 1, 2000, is entitled to parental leave.

Madam Speaker, I have heard that you are aware of this problem. I am personally trying to collect signatures. As a member of parliament you might be doing an excellent job in this regard. What I am saying is that under the new act a woman who was expected to deliver her baby on January 5, 2001, but who did so on December 12, 2000, is not entitled to extended parental leave. She is not allowed the maximum period under the new legislation.

• (1310)

I find that a bit unfortunate. As members know, as the critic for the status of women I will do my best to explain, to change and to improve women's living conditions.

All this should be taken into account, if possible, because women represent 52% of the population in Canada. Women are in charge of bringing children up. It is the women who make Canada and Quebec what they are.

[*English*]

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to speak today in the House to Bill C-2 and, in particular, to the amendment.

I would first like to pay tribute to the incredible amount of work that has taken place to bring the bill to where it is today, limited as it is.

I along with many of my colleagues were elected in 1997. From day one of being elected to parliament, members of the New Democratic Party took up the issue of the discrimination and unfairness in the Employment Insurance Act which was brought in 1996. In particular, our spokesperson on unemployment insurance, the member for Acadie—Bathurst, has taken this issue up with an absolute passion and is an advocate for the unemployed men and women in this country. It is the work of that member and of other members in the opposition that has forced this issue on to the political agenda. It is quite ironic to see the amount of effort that

was needed to force the government to bring forward even the very limited changes that are before us today in Bill C-2.

In looking over the bill and the amendments, there is no question that if the bill is approved in its present form it would still act as a discriminatory piece of legislation and hurt those members of society who need the most protection and support.

A glaring contradiction to the bill are the statements the government side has made in the House professing to be concerned about the increase in child poverty. I remember the unanimous resolution that was approved by the House in 1989, moved by the then leader of the NDP, Mr. Ed Broadbent, calling for the elimination of child poverty by the year 2000. It was a noble goal. Not only have we not reached that goal, we have fallen further behind. We now have more children living in poverty as a result of public policies. One of those public policies is what has taken place with employment insurance.

My colleague from Winnipeg North Centre spoke very eloquently on how the bill historically, and even today, would have a very negative impact on women. When we look at the provisions of the bill we realize that even though women pay into employment insurance they will not qualify.

On the one hand, with great respect, we have come to this point only because of the absolute determination of members in our party and other parties to bring this forward. On the other hand, it is with a note of frustration and anxiety when I see that the bill still does not fundamentally address the inequities that exist within the system.

As the member for Winnipeg North Centre noted earlier, if the bill had come forward with a gender based analysis, as the government side said that it would, we would not be debating the bill in its current form today.

• (1315)

I am concerned that the provisions before us today will not help part time workers. They will not help women and they will not help all new parents. One of the positive things about the bill is that it does provide new provisions for new parents, but not all new parents will qualify.

I can tell members, and I am sure it is true for other members of the House, about the phone calls I am getting in my constituency office in Vancouver East from people who are desperate for support for their families.

My constituents hear about the debate in the House of Commons. They look with a sense of hope that some changes could be coming to provide them with some relief to pay the rent, to put food on the table, and to have bus fare to go to school and to go to various activities in the community. Constituents phone and ask

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whether the bill would help them, whether they would qualify for employment insurance.

Reading the fine print we find that there are still huge numbers of people, particularly women, part time workers and seasonal workers, who will be left behind.

The New Democratic Party is concerned that Bill C-2, the employment insurance bill, further entrenches growing inequality. Members have an opportunity to recognize that the moneys that flow into the fund come from the workers of Canada. We have a financial, social and political responsibility to make sure that unemployed workers, parents who are seeking re-entry into the workforce and members of our society are protected.

We have a responsibility to ensure that they are treated with fairness and that they are not penalized by clawback measures which still exist in the current bill. Unfortunately that is not the case. The changes in the bill are so limited that the number of people who would be affected is very small.

The New Democratic Party and I know we are joined by other members who understand that the political process is determined and resolved in its efforts to make sure the issue stays at the top of the political agenda. It is about fairness and equality. It is about recognizing how women have been discriminated against.

We believe in the charter of rights and in equality. We believe that when workers pay into a fund they have a right to income security when they are either unemployed, laid off or seasonal workers. New parents should have access to parental leave. They have a right to a certain level of comfort and security.

We will continue to work very hard to make sure that the amendments before us today that deal with some of the worst aspects of the bill and try to improve it are passed. There is no question that a much more indepth analysis is required on the whole question of employment insurance.

I urge all members of the House to support the amendments before us today that deal with some of the problems in the bill. It must not stop there. It is only one small step. We must be committed to ensuring there are further changes to the system to end discrimination against unemployed people and women. We must accept a very basic premise that unemployed people in Canada have a right to access their own insurance funds.

One of the worst scandals is how the fund has been raided over the years by the Government of Canada. Thirty-five billion dollars has been taken in tax cuts to balance the books. That does not help poor people. In any other instance this would be a completely intolerable situation, yet it has been allowed to happen here.

• (1320)

It is so shameful that we see people desperately trying to keep a roof over their heads, to pay bills every month, and to have their kids go to school. Yet these billions of dollars have been accumulated in the surplus fund and the money will not go to the people who most desperately need it. There is no other example that is as outrageous, as discriminatory and as unfair as this one.

We on this side of the House and in this party will continue to fight what appears to be the agenda of the government, to ensure that unemployed people do not get what they deserve. We want to make sure they have full access to income security and are treated with fairness and without discrimination.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is passing strange that we should still be discussing this EI reform in 2001. When I was the secretary general of the CSN back in 1995-96 we were discussing exactly the same issues.

When Mr. Axworthy brought in this reform as human resources minister we warned him that it would penalize many workers, and it did.

At this very moment 6 out of 10 workers who contribute and then lose their jobs do not qualify. It is totally unacceptable in a society that is supposed to be democratic and value its safety net.

Obviously the bill before us does not correct the fundamental flaws we pointed out in 1995-96 and still condemn.

In my riding of Joliette, for example, there are many farm workers. Because of the kind of harvesting they are hired for, many of them do not work a sufficient number of weeks to qualify for benefits. They leave for big cities like Montreal to find jobs and make ends meet. We are therefore losing highly skilled farm workers.

Perhaps the federal government thinks anybody can be turned into a farm worker when the harvesting season comes. This is not the way it works. It takes people who, after several years of experience, know when it is appropriate to harvest. If there are no experienced workers, choices will have to be made. They will cost thousands of dollars, sometimes even millions of dollars, in terms of farm income. This will penalize not only farm producers but also the region as a whole, like my region of Joliette. Lanaudière is also a region where there are more independent workers than the Canadian average.

I remember quite well Mr. Axworthy saying at the time that this reform was precisely aimed at adapting the EI plan to make it more compatible with the new realities in the labour market. We see that since 1995-96 the number of independent workers has increased and our plan is still not adapted to this new reality in the labour market.

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These are people who do extremely important work in terms of general economic activity. These people are needed, but they are excluded from the social safety net and unduly penalized.

It would be very easy to find ways to include in the EI plan some protection for independent workers. Indeed, Quebec was able to do so in its—

And the fire alarm having rung:

SITTING SUSPENDED

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): We will suspend for a few minutes.

(The sitting of the House was suspended at 1.21 p.m.)

• (1335)

SITTING RESUMED

(The House resumed at 1.38 p.m.)

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Madam Speaker, I hope it is not my fiery comments that triggered the alarm. Anyway my mother would be very pleased with my speech.

To pick up where I left off, I was saying that the debate we are having today is somewhat preposterous because the flaws and the adverse impact of the EI reform have now been experienced for more than five years throughout Quebec and Canada. It has penalized farm workers, as I mentioned with regard to my riding, self-employed workers who are excluded and young families.

My colleague from Terrebonne—Blainville talked about this at length a while ago, but it is important for me to mention it again, as my riding of Joliette includes suburbs such as Le Gardeur and L'Assomption where many young families are finding it extremely difficult to get their lives organized, to combine work and family, and who should have access to sensible parental leave.

As a matter of fact, as I was winding up my speech when the alarm sounded I was saying that in Quebec we were imaginative enough to include self-employed workers in the parental leave program introduced by the minister of the day. Therefore, if the federal government had any imagination, we could solve all the problems that have been identified in the EI reform.

It is obvious that Bill C-2, just like its predecessor Bill C-44, solves none of the basic problems which have been identified by everybody. I am happy that the committee unanimously adopted the motion by my colleague, the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, asking that it report back on all these aspects by June 1.

• (1340)

I will concentrate on a particular aspect of Bill C-2 that we on this side consider fundamental, that is clause 9 in which the government claims the right to set the rate of EI premiums currently set by the Employment Insurance Commission with the approval of the governor in council and under the recommendation of the Minister of Human Resources Development and the Minister of Finance.

I know that the Minister of Finance has repeatedly ignored the commission's recommendations over the last few years, but there is at least a debate held regularly on the rate required to finance the measures provided for in the employment insurance program.

With clause 9 of Bill C-2 the government is trying to legalize what it is doing already, that is to legalize the misappropriation of funds we are witnessing with the creation of a surplus completely unrelated to the needs of the EI fund, a \$35 billion surplus accumulated since 1995. This is totally unacceptable.

The premiums are paid by the workers and by the employers. We believe that it should be up to them, and only them, to set the rates needed for funding the measures provided for in the employment insurance plan.

The federal government accomplished quite a feat, and it is not the first time, when it achieved a consensus in Quebec among all partners in the labour market against clause 9, indeed against Bill C-2. When we see that the FTQ and the Conseil du patronat both denounce clause 9 by which the government is giving itself the right to establish contribution rates, I think there is a problem and the government should do something right now to convince us not to vote against Bill C-2. Obviously the Bloc finds the bill totally unacceptable because of clause 9.

However we must go further. How can the government justify giving itself the right to set premium rates under clause 9? I believe the government does not see the full impact of that provision because there are relatively few social consensus building fora in Canada. We know that labour relations have been rather stormy in the past and still are today.

Our unionization rate is not as high as I would like it to be but it is still one of the highest in the western world. In Quebec, for example, it is about 40% while in Canada it is around 34%. A government must have a social relation vision in order to be able to make labour market partners accountable on a number of issues.

With workers and employers each having a representative the EI commission was a consensus building forum. It encouraged social dialogue. By eliminating that forum through clause 9 the government is directly depriving labour market partners of their responsibilities and giving itself the right to decide the contribution rate of a plan to which it is not giving a cent. By taking that responsibility away from partners on the labour market it contributes to creating,

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I would even say generating, a vision of confrontation in terms of labour relations. In that regard I think the federal government is not acting responsibly.

Instead of doing what everyone is trying to do now in the western world, that is creating forums for social dialogue, it is eliminating one by giving itself the right to set the premium rates. I think that the approach taken in clause 9 goes beyond, and far beyond, the issue of employment insurance, even though that is already unacceptable. It goes to show that the government has no vision as far as the development of social relations within our society is concerned.

In that regard I urge the government to accept the amendment we brought in to delete clause 9 so that we can vote for Bill C-2, although we are aware that the legislation does not resolve the problems I have pointed out concerning admissibility. I hope this can be addressed after the committee tables its report in early June.

• (1345)

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I will say a few words on this important but incomplete bill which obviously does not answer the needs of workers in Quebec and Canada in terms of improving on the Axworthy reform.

As the member for Joliette said, we have been discussing the issue of employment insurance, formerly unemployment insurance, reform for ages. We have been discussing it since the days of Mr. Axworthy, who was replaced by the current Minister for International Trade, who was himself replaced by Mr. Dingwall, then by Mr. Doug Young, and finally by the incredible current Minister of Human Resources Development who had some problems we are all familiar with. Thus it is not the first time that members opposite are proposing major changes. They already did that with the disastrous impact we are all too familiar with.

In a riding like Trois-Rivières, in 1989 83% of workers were eligible for unemployment insurance benefits in the unhappy event that they lost their jobs because they contributed to the UI fund. Now only 34% of those who contribute to the EI fund qualify. This is what this government has managed to do. It is a scandal we are faced with daily.

This means that the Mauricie, which includes the ridings of Trois-Rivières, Champlain and Saint-Maurice, the Prime Minister's riding, is being short-changed by tens of millions of dollars in funds that could have been invested to keep the economy going.

It is a bit ironic to hear the member for Saint-Maurice, the Prime Minister, with all the problems he is experiencing with the Auberge Grand-Mère, say that it was to maintain and create jobs that he invested there and that consequently he is entitled to get his money back. We know that he was involved in some of the administrative measures taken by his own government, which have deprived our

region of hundreds of millions of dollars since 1994. Therefore it is indecent on his part to say such irresponsible things, which show a lack of respect and contempt for the workers of his own riding.

There are some very serious omissions in this reform, as we can see from what happened to the surplus in the employment insurance fund. We know that in less than 10 years the surplus has grown to the point where it now stands at \$35 billion. The government had maintained the 1997 decision to abolish the program for older worker adjustment, better known as POWA. This program was the result of cutbacks to a more generous program, work adjustment training or WAT. This program was designed specifically for the workers in the Canadian textile industry which fell victim to decisions made in Ottawa concerning a foreign trade deal with countries less developed than ours whereby we would exchange wheat for textiles. This measure affected the economy in Quebec where 70% of the textiles were produced in those days.

There was a program specifically created for the closing of textile plants, and it was known as WAT. It was designed for all textile workers. The program was fundamentally changed and became the program for older worker adjustment, POWA, which was more universal but had more stringent rules. In 1997 the federal government had too much on its plate in its fight against the deficit on the backs of poor people, so it decided to completely abolish POWA without any reservations and any further compensation.

Today, despite the \$35 billion surplus, we still have to live with the same administrative decision. When plants close, sometimes ruthlessly or for external reasons of non-profitability compared to foreign competition or management negligence, workers are footing the bill and those who are 55 years of age and over are not receiving any compensation.

In Trois-Rivières this has had the following result: the Tripaq plant, despite considerable assistance from the Fonds de solidarité des travailleurs du Québec, which should be recognized, that did everything in its power to save it, had to close its doors for objective reasons. The federal government totally washed its hands of the matter. However much we appeal to the government as we do on other issues, it was useless, I am thinking of my colleague from Drummond who on the issue of the Celanese plant had some people come here to show their frustration and express their hope of being able to rely on public funds they themselves contributed to, it was useless.

• (1350)

I want to remind the House that the federal government has no money in the EI fund. It is \$35 billion that belongs to workers and employers. Today the federal government wants to maintain the rates it talked about during its totally demagogic election campaign because the Bloc courageously opposed this before the campaign.

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It wants to maintain control as if this was its own money, and this is totally indecent.

If members were to ask workers and business people if they wanted POWA to be reintroduced, with all the financial help and social solidarity this program entailed, I am sure that they would agree to have substantial help provided to older workers who lose their jobs.

In a riding like Trois-Rivières this can be devastating. Despite all its promises and all its billions of dollars, the federal government's lack of concern and understanding is quite shameful. What we are talking about here is a hidden tax, a special tax paid by workers earning \$39,000 or less. With only 34% instead of 83% of the people getting benefits, this is a misappropriation of funds.

We will keep on criticizing the federal government for not spending public funds most effectively, for not showing more compassion to fathers, mothers and children facing hard times, and for not strengthening the social fabric.

When we go from 83% to 34% women working part time and seasonal workers are hard hit. I thought it was shameful and totally immoral for the federal government to stop talking about seasonal jobs and start talking about seasonal workers. These workers are full time workers who unfortunately have seasonal jobs. This is something we should remind the people in charge of the EI system and their minister of. We have to adapt the system to the realities these workers are facing.

Also, this legislation goes after the students. They have summer jobs and pay EI premiums, and yet they know they will never be able to collect any benefit.

The lack of concern of the federal government applies also to the POWA file, as I mentioned, but in view of the government's surplus it also applies to an issue that has to do with the pulp and paper industry, the existence of which I am pleased to mention today. I am referring to the integrated centre for pulp and paper technology, a natural field for the Saint Maurice valley, which is vital to how we have traditionally defined ourselves.

There is a plan to merge the research centre of the Université du Québec in Trois-Rivières with the Centre for Pulp and Paper Technology at the cégep de Trois-Rivières. The Quebec government has already announced its intention to be financially involved in this project, pledging tens of millions of dollars. It is a \$85 million to \$100 million project.

Hopefully this afternoon the minister of finance of Quebec is going to reaffirm her intention to support this project. However the federal government is stalling. The infamous Canada Foundation for Innovation, set up by the current Minister of Finance with \$1.3 billion of taxpayer money, has so far said no.

To this day nobody in this government has cared to make up for this seemingly totally arbitrary decision. This project, which is a top priority in Quebec, does not even register on Canada's radar screen.

This issue is the perfect illustration of our two solitudes. It reflects two different ways of seeing things. It shows that our priorities are very seldom the same. Hopefully Quebecers will understand that they have no future in this country, and that it is only when we are masters of our own destiny once and for all that we will be able to work within a true partnership between Quebec and Canada.

• (1355)

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Madam Speaker, I rise to express my opposition to Bill C-2.

My colleagues presented many aspects of the legislation that show that the government has no respect for employees as well as employers by not addressing their problems.

This legislation is hurting workers by refusing to address urgent situations and to correct the deficiencies of the current act.

What the Bloc Québécois is asking for is clear. The measures the Bloc Québécois is asking for are meant to correct flaws in the plan by taking into account the day to day condition of workers and a labour market that keeps changing, with students who have to combine a job and studying and an increasing number of independent workers. These two groups are not taken into account in the bill, but they will have to be soon.

It is the duty of the federal government to address the issue right away so that these two groups of workers are included just like other workers already covered by the plan.

The Bloc Québécois is asking the federal government to respond to the hopes of workers, to further improve the EI plan and to eliminate discrimination in EI requirements.

We have to abolish the definition of labour force, because it penalizes directly the young and women in that they have to work a total of 910 hours in 52 weeks to qualify.

A women who re-enters the labour market after two years is considered a new entrant and not a member of the labour market. What a shame.

The same is true of young people who are also considered new entrants, because they are in their first job. This same definition allows certain workers to be eligible for the same plan with no more than 420 hours accumulated.

The self-employed have been completely forgotten. It might even be said that this segment does not exist at all, or worse, is not worth the bother to the government. Self-employed workers represented 12% of the total workforce in 1976. They represented 18%

in 1999. The government cannot deny this segment of the population which now represents one worker in five. The figure is huge.

We must absolutely not forget that this sector of workers is growing. The federal government must, right now, include these workers fully in the employment insurance plan.

Another group penalized by this bill is that of young people. It creates a dichotomy in that students must go to school as well as work in order to survive and in the hopes of finding well paid work. However the standards in this bill give them no help at all.

The latest census in 1996 reported over 2.8 million full time students. According to the monitoring and assessment report one million individuals earned less than \$2,000 and were therefore entitled to a refund.

However, only 40% of these people applied for a refund and 42% of them were under 25 years of age. In short, 2.6 million students are being taxed to study. Young people—

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but it is 2 p.m. and we must proceed to statements by members. He will have five and a half minutes to complete his remarks after oral question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

HOCKEY

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to stand in the House and share with all members information on a truly unique event taking place in my constituency this weekend. The 12th annual Vince Ryan Old Timers Hockey Tournament is being held in Cape Breton beginning today and will see 125 teams from across Canada and the United States converge on my community.

The tournament's namesake, Vince Ryan, was recognized throughout Cape Breton and indeed the Atlantic provinces as a skilled athlete, a fierce competitor and a man who held high a sense of fair play and sportsmanship.

Upward of 2,000 players will compete in the spirit of fellowship in the country's national winter pastime in what has become one of Atlantic Canada's premier adult recreational sporting events.

I thank Duddy Ryan, the entire Ryan family, Ritchie Warren and his committed group of volunteers for ensuring that this annual

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event continues to be a highlight of our Cape Breton winters. I wish them all the very best in this week's tournament.

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AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on Saturday, March 31, Denis Desautels, the Auditor General of Canada, will retire after 10 years of dedicated service as an officer of parliament. I rise today to acknowledge his contribution as one of Canada's most dedicated and trusted public servants.

He has served our country well. As members of parliament our integrity is often questioned in the House, but his integrity is beyond question. He has been our conscience and our watchdog. When he speaks, the nation listens.

Many of his reports have highlighted the problems of waste and mismanagement in government and the need for transparency and openness in government. At times he fundamentally disagreed with government and held his ground, but they all speak amply of his dedication to improving the service Canadians receive from their government.

On behalf of all members of parliament and senators, I thank the auditor general. We wish him a happy retirement or a new career, but whatever the future holds and wherever it may take him, he goes with the best wishes of all in the House and indeed of all Canadians whom he has served so well.

* * *

F. R. CRAWLEY

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is Oscar week and the 25th anniversary of Canada's first academy award for a documentary film *The Man Who Skied Down Everest*.

This was won by F. R. Budge Crawley who in his acceptance speech said:

Thank you. . .for this American award for a Canadian film about a Japanese. . .who skied down a mountain in Nepal.

Crawley Films received hundreds of awards for its thousands of films and TV shows. It was a springboard for stars with names like Bujold, Davis, Greene, Grierson, Little, Pinsent and Plummer.

The late Budge Crawley was a pioneer cameraman, director and producer. He received an honorary degree from Trent University and was a member of the Order of Canada. His work, including much Arctic footage, now forms the Crawley Collection in the National Archives.

He was recognized for his Oscar in the House of Commons on March 30, 1976. We honour him again today.

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FIGURE SKATING

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the World Figure Skating Championships were held in Vancouver, British Columbia.

Over 200 athletes from 55 countries and 540 volunteers participated in this global event which took place from March 19 to March 25. The federal government provided financial support of \$250,000 through the hosting of major sporting events in Canada program.

Special thanks to the minister for amateur sport for his presence and support for this unique project in B.C. He, Senator Joyce Fairbairn and I worked together as a Liberal team to help promote B.C. and Canada to the world.

I extend congratulations to everyone involved in this successful event.

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[*Translation*]

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN BROME—MISSISQUOI

Mr. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to salute nine young students from Brome—Missisquoi for distinguished achievements over the past year.

Mélissa Arbour, of Magog, Joël Brault, of Cowansville, and Francis-Yan Cyr-Racine, of Bedford, received the Governor General's History Medal for the Millennium.

Isabelle Fontaine, of the Canton of Magog, and Adam Hooper, of Sutton, received the Governor General's Academic Medal.

Marie-Ève DuGrenier and Kim Desrochers, of Farnham, Joanie Beauséjour and Michelle Campbell, of Bedford, came away with honours from the Bell Science Fair Eastern Township regional finals.

Congratulations to these young people. They must be proud of their accomplishments. I admire their determination, creativity and desire to excel. A future full of promise is before them.

On behalf of the people of Brome—Missisquoi, I to tell them know how proud we are of their success.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the summit of the Americas takes place in Quebec City in three weeks, bringing together heads of state from 34

nations to discuss a number of issues including the creation of a free trade agreement for the Americas.

A parallel people's summit is being organized around the same time to protest the summit of the Americas. Groups who are participating in the people's summit include the Council of Canadians, Canadian Auto Workers and our very own NDP members of parliament, as well as many others.

What I find very disturbing is that some groups are advocating that people should break the law. They are very public in their intentions to train activists in the skills of civil disobedience.

What is even more disturbing is that these groups, through the people's summit, are being funded by our federal government. The Prime Minister has handed out \$300,000 to these organizations. It is appalling that the government would spend taxpayer money to support people who intend to break the law.

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ABORIGINAL ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two Nunavummiut, Mariano Aupilardjuk of Rankin Inlet and Zacharias Kunuk of Igloolik, are recipients of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation 2001 awards.

Both Mariano Aupilardjuk and Zacharias Kunuk are well known for their work in promoting Inuit culture within Nunavut and throughout the world.

Mariano Aupilardjuk is a teacher of Inuit traditional knowledge, a great performer known for his drum dancing and song writing and for the beautiful carvings he makes.

Zacharias Kunuk co-founded the first independent Inuit film company, Isuma Productions of Igloolik. He has just completed his own feature length movie, made in Igloolik and performed by local actors and actresses.

I know their families and friends are very proud of the two recipients. I wish to extend my congratulations to Mariano Aupilardjuk and Zacharias Kunuk.

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[*Translation*]

SALON DU LIVRE DE L'OUTAOUAIS

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the opening of the 22nd Salon du livre de l'Outaouais, at the Palais des congrès de Hull. The theme this year is "Lire aux éclats", which alludes to the great joy of reading.

The book fair runs for five days and will feature panel discussions, meet-the-authors, literary games, literary receptions, book-

signings, interviews, and books, books and still more books, as well as hours of delightful readings.

This international event is the work of a remarkable team of people who have devoted their time, energy and passion to it for some months. Congratulations to them, and thank you.

Particular mention needs to be made of the generous contribution of Estelle Desfossés, chairman of the board of the Salon du livre de l'Outaouais, who is also the committee co-ordinator for the Bloc Québécois.

We wish the Salon du livre de l'Outaouais every success.

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[English]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Steve Mahoney (Mississauga West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the citizenship and immigration committee is hearing witnesses on Bill C-11 to help rewrite the Immigration Act for the first time in 25 years. It deals with issues such as visitor visas, landed immigrant status, permanent residency and refugee determination.

We want to hear from as many Canadians as possible. Our plan was to travel to Vancouver, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal and London, Ontario to hear people's concerns. Schedules were laid out, but the Canadian Alliance says it will not go. Instead we will be relegated to hearing people who can get to Ottawa and to teleconferencing.

The Canadian Alliance now wants to hijack committees the same way it has hijacked parliament. Canadians are fed up with these tactics. Instead of listening to concerns from across the country, the Canadian Alliance would rather throw mud and destroy parliament. It is doing a disservice to the country.

* * *

NATIONAL WAR MUSEUM

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, veterans and friends of the war museum from across Canada have raised millions of dollars toward the building of the new national war museum. They were told that it would be built in Rockcliffe to complement the aviation museum and the new military cemetery.

In 1998 when the federal government announced a new \$70 million war museum there was great joy. Today it appears the location will be changed to LeBreton Flats. The original joy has now turned to bitter disappointment.

Why does the government feel that it has a right to change the original location without any consultation whatsoever with those who have donated so generously?

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• (1410)

If this move takes place without total agreement from the loyal supporters of the war museum, it will be a national betrayal. Who will benefit from the property that was originally reserved for the war museum? Certainly not the vets.

* * *

[Translation]

ORGANIZED CRIME

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Laval East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since opposition members are silent on the important events taking place in the country, I would like to draw the attention of this House to the impressive job done by our police forces to fight organized crime.

By launching Operation Printemps 2001, police forces have destabilized criminal motorcycle gangs. In all, over 200 searches were conducted and 125 arrests were made, this following an investigation that lasted over two years. Let us acknowledge the remarkable work done by our police officers.

The message sent to criminal gangs is clear: criminal activities will not be tolerated in Canada. Our government is very concerned about the activities of criminal gangs. Our communities must not live in fear.

The commitments made during the last election campaign are clear. This week's operation shows more than ever that our government is on the right track.

* * *

[English]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the new Liberal government is only four months old and already we see that what the Liberals said during the election has nothing to do with their actions once elected. There is a long list of broken promises, from scrapping the GST and eliminating child poverty to an independent ethics counsellor.

What are Liberal members doing that they never talked about during the election? They never said a word about toll roads, but now the transport minister cannot wait for Canadians to start paying to use their own highways.

Another example is airport fees. It already costs an arm and a leg to fly. Now the Liberal government is letting airports jack up landing fees, taking even more money out of the pockets of travellers. The transport minister states that people voted for this when they voted in the Liberals. I wonder why the red book did not say a word about it.

Toll roads and airport fees would not be necessary if the Liberal government adequately funded infrastructure. Canadians expect

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their taxes to fund public infrastructure. They should not have to pay even more in the form of road tolls and landing fees.

The government has the money and it should commit the necessary funding for our highways and infrastructure. That is what Canadians deserve, not more Liberal neglect.

* * *

[*Translation*]

QUEBEC

Mr. Yves Rochelleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the attitude of the Canadian government toward Quebec, its people and its institutions is looking more and more like an obsession.

After the attacks of this government on provincial jurisdictions, as exemplified by the 1999 social union framework agreement, the federal government at it again, stifling the voice of Quebec at the upcoming Summit of the Americas.

The Liberal government is essentially marginalizing Quebec and the existing consensus about its existence as a nation and its legitimate aspirations having to be recognized as such by the world.

Canada's nation building is based on centralizing in Ottawa a number of discretionary powers to spend and to manage affairs that do not belong to the federal government. This is irreconcilable with the aspirations of Quebec and of its people, regardless of their political allegiance. Let those in charge be warned that Quebec is neither stupid nor for sale.

* * *

[*English*]

ORGANIZED CRIME

Mr. John Harvard (Charleswood St. James—Assiniboia, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I salute the action taken yesterday by Canada's police forces in cracking down on organized crime.

With up to 150 arrests made, yesterday's operation springtime 2001 is being called the biggest anti-gang operation in Canada's history. This is just part of an ongoing campaign to make it clear to the criminal element that we will be vigilant in demonstrating that these kinds of underworld activities are not tolerated in our communities.

Yesterday's raids came after many months of investigations and groundwork conducted by our police forces. One of the many tools used by police forces was the broader powers granted to them by the anti-gang law passed by the government in 1997.

Putting an end to organized crime remains a key concern of the government. We commit to continue to stand behind our police

forces and to ensure they have the powers and resources necessary to keep putting organized crime in its place.

* * *

FRESHWATER EXPORTS

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have a news flash. Tragically I have to announce that the Liberal Party is now in favour of encouraging bulk water exports, jeopardizing Canada's natural ecological heritage.

● (1415)

The Liberal Party of Newfoundland and Premier Grimes are guilty of this crime by pushing forward with the plan to export freshwater from Gisbourne Lake, a scheme first envisioned by our current Ministry of Industry.

Equally guilty as an accessory to the crime is the Liberal Party of Canada for remaining silent and not condemning the actions of its Liberal cousins. Moreover, the Liberal government is guilty in failing to deliver a national strategy to ensure the prevention of interbasin transfers and bulk shipments of freshwater. Bill C-6 falls short of the mark and does nothing for non-transboundary water.

For eight years we have watched the Liberal government neglect the environment. I ask the ministers of the environment, heritage and international trade, as well as the Prime Minister, why they have flip-flopped and are now encouraging bulk water shipments through their silence and legislative inaction.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[*English*]

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in provinces like Ontario and British Columbia simply calling crown corporations, let alone arm twisting them for a loan, would constitute a violation of the ethics code.

In most cities and towns in our nation calling an official and arm twisting for a loan for a hotel next to a property which he owned would cost that elected official. It would be a violation of the code of ethics of that town or city.

Why is the highest elected office in the country held to a lower ethical standard than aldermen and alderwomen in small towns? Why is he held to a lower standard?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, acting as a member of parliament, did not arm twist. He made representations as all members of parliament do.

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He was not dealing in a matter connected with a property he owned. He was trying to assist the tourism industry of the area.

Speaking of ethical standards, what about the ethical standards not followed by the Leader of the Opposition in connection with that shameful lawsuit in Alberta?

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, wrong again, wrong again. During the Sinclair Stevens affair the Minister of Industry said:

The spectacle of the wife of a cabinet minister seeking terms for a loan that are unavailable at normal lending institutions would be a conflict of interest.

Those were his words. This is a spectacle of the Prime Minister himself not just seeking but actively arm twisting a public servant to get a loan for a hotel next to a property on which he was owed money.

Why does the Minister of Industry not want the Prime Minister to be held accountable to the same standards that he insisted on for Sinclair Stevens?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether the Leader of the Opposition is aware of it or not, the fact of the matter is that the people of Canada quite frankly are fed up with this line of questioning.

They have come to the conclusion that the Prime Minister of Canada has acted in an honourable fashion. They are quite frankly wondering why the Leader of the Opposition has nothing else he can talk about as he desperately tries to save his leadership.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the chosen son is learning from his master the art of evasion.

[*Translation*]

Both William Parker, the judge who presided over the Sinclair Stevens inquiry, and Robert Rutherford, who presided over the Somalia inquiry, called for an independent inquiry into the Shawinigate affair.

Is the Prime Minister going to listen to these universally respected ethics experts and set up an independent inquiry so that we will finally have the whole story on Shawinigate?

[*English*]

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the RCMP confirmed that the Prime Minister acted properly. Over and over again the ethics counsellor confirmed there was no breach of ethics on the part of the Prime Minister.

Once again the Leader of the Opposition is failing Canadians. He is not doing his job by asking questions on matters of importance to Canadians. He does not care about softwood lumber. He does not

care about agriculture. He does not care about the health of Canadians. He has failed. He should go, resign today.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the bill of sale the Prime Minister released on Tuesday is a very strange piece of paper. It is amazing that two corporate lawyers would sign a paper with no letterhead, no corporate seal, no witnesses and no deposit.

In fact the payment schedule was even an afterthought, almost as if the Prime Minister did not care if he got paid.

• (1420)

Did the Prime Minister not ask for a deposit because he was more concerned about a parking spot for his shares than getting paid for them?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member must have gone to the same law school as the leader of the Conservative Party. A binding contract does not need a letterhead. It can be in handwriting. The basic thing is to show the intentions of the parties.

The intention was that the Prime Minister, before he became Prime Minister, sold all his shares to Mr. Prince's company. That is what happened. Those are the facts, and the hon. member ought to admit it.

Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that the date of the bill of the sale is the very date that the Prime Minister chose his first cabinet.

Surely the Prime Minister could have found at least one individual who was confident enough to draft a proper legal document. What circumstances forced the Prime Minister to sign such a dubious piece of paper?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize to the law schools which the Conservative leader flunked out of. I am sure that the hon. member is following the same practice. Her legal advice is equally unsound.

The document is a legally binding one. This is confirmed in a later agreement between Mr. Prince's company and Mr. Michaud's company when Mr. Prince signed that document which contained a statement that he, Mr. Prince, had owned the shares all along from and after November 1993.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is still claiming that he sold his shares in the Grand-Mère Golf Club to Jonas Prince in November 1993. But, in the September 1999 agreement, it is J&AC Consultants, the Prime Minister's company, which, under article 2.2, indemnifies and saves harmless the new buyer against potential "losses, damages, and expenses" arising from this sale.

Oral Questions

Why is it the Prime Minister's company that is providing this guarantee and not Jonas Prince, the supposed owner of the shares?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the facts are clear. The Prime Minister sold his shares before he became Prime Minister and the shares were sold by Mr. Prince to Mr. Michaud. The facts are clear.

Why is the hon. member not prepared to accept these facts? He must accept them because they are the facts and they are true.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we must accept them because the Prime Minister tells us to. This is a powerful argument.

It is the Prime Minister who is providing the vendor's guarantee to the new buyer, Mr. Michaud. It seems to me that to provide a vendor's guarantee, the Prime Minister would have to admit that he had something to sell. Otherwise, he would not be providing such a guarantee.

How is it that, in 1999, it was not Jonas Prince providing the vendor's guarantee but the Prime Minister's company? Let him explain that to us, rather than complacently believing what his leader tells him.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the advice I have received, the documents contain the usual clauses found in such transactions. It is a fact that Mr. Prince and his company sold all their shares to Mr. Michaud's company. This proves that the Prime Minister was not a shareholder at the necessary times.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told this House that he had sold his shares in 1993. The ethics counsellor backed up the Prime Minister by saying that it was a sale without right of reversion.

If the Prime Minister and the ethics counsellor were speaking the truth, what was the Prime Minister doing in the 1999 transaction? How can a person sell something that has not been in his possession for six years?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said, on March 15, and I quote:

Does he not understand that the only way to settle this matter, to exonerate himself... is to provide us with the record of sale, as we have demanded so many times already? Let him provide that, and the problem will be over.

• (1425)

He tabled it. So there are no more problems. The hon. member must withdraw his words, because the Prime Minister tabled the record of sale, as the hon. member asked him to.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, they would be all too happy to have the Prime Minister exonerated when he is in it up to here.

Article 2.1 of the 1999 agreement confirms that the Prime Minister's company "or any third party will have no further property rights or interest in the shares".

If the Prime Minister signed this document and stated that he had no further property rights, it means that just before signing the 1999 agreement he had an interest, he had property rights and he is in conflict of interest.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member told RDI "The Prime Minister just has to say 'Yes, it was sold, here is the record of sale'". And that is exactly what the Prime Minister said "Here is the record of sale".

So the member must withdraw his allegations because they are totally false.

* * *

[English]

FRESHWATER EXPORTS

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the premier of Newfoundland has said that he intends to export water in bulk from Gisborne Lake without regard to the well-being of the rest of Canada. Whether that endangers our ability to control our water resources, or anything else, he does not care.

I have a question for the Deputy Prime Minister. The NDP believes it is very important for the federal government today to repudiate in the strongest possible way, not just rhetorically but legislatively if possible, what the premier of Newfoundland has said.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister indicate today that they will bring in a national ban on the bulk export of water?

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bill on water exports should be debated in the House the week we return from the spring recess.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, they say ask about something else and then we get that kind of crap for an answer.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona clearly did not like the answer. That is apparent to everyone. He also knows that it is quite unparliamentary to use that kind of language in the House.

Oral Questions

I would hope that he would be perhaps more discrete in his question. He is welcome to ask a supplementary question that we can hear, but I hope he would refrain from the use of such language and carry out the proper decorum of the House.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I asked the Deputy Prime Minister a question. Will he on behalf of the federal Government of Canada get up and repudiate the premier of Newfoundland who intends to jeopardize, thanks to NAFTA which does not have an exemption for water despite what the Liberals say, the entire country's water supply?

Will they repudiate that today and bring in a ban?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think I had better get up before the hon. member does himself some damage. Canadians agree that we need to protect the integrity of Canada's water resources. It is our strategy, as indicated by the hon. House leader, to prohibit bulk water removal from major drainage basins in Canada.

It is my understanding that the new premier of Newfoundland has simply said that he is thinking about the issue and he will not do anything about it until the fall. This gives us time to confirm through the legislation our position on behalf of all Canadians. We are working on behalf of all Canadians, on this water issue. We will continue to do so and I am sure—

The Speaker: The right hon. member for Calgary Centre.

* * *

PRIME MINISTER

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have for the Deputy Prime Minister some straightforward questions about the handwritten document the Prime Minister claims to be a bill of sale.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister tell us: Did both parties sign that document at the same time? In what town or city and province was that note signed, and were there any witnesses?

• (1430)

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the document speaks for itself.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the document is as silent on that issue as the government has been in answer to legitimate questions from all four parties in the House.

In the Vander Zalm case Mr. Justice Ted Hughes' finding of a conflict of interest was based on his judgment that Mr. Vander Zalm "had retained an interest in the financial well-being of his company". Does the Deputy Prime Minister believe that to be an adequate basis for a finding of conflict of interest?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot comment on Mr. Vander Zalm, but I can say that the Prime Minister did exactly what the hon. leader of the fifth party said in a scrum on March 13:

The way the Prime Minister could settle this is to lay upon the table of the House of Commons the agreement of sale between himself and Jonas Prince.

He has done that. Why should he question our doing exactly what he asked us to do? I guess he lacks confidence in himself at the end of the day.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing what two sophisticated lawyers can draw up that causes even more confusion than it clears.

Here is another question for the Deputy Prime Minister to evade. We know that J&AC holdings supposedly owned a 25% interest in the golf course, yet the bill of sale only deals with "approximately 22% of the shares".

Could the Deputy Prime Minister shed any light at all on what happened to the other approximately 3% shares of the golf course?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agreement in 1999, I believe it was in September, between Mr. Prince's company and Mr. Michaud's company made very clear that Mr. Prince's company sold to Mr. Michaud's company all the shares he had purchased from the Prime Minister in September 1993.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I suggested there would be an evasion and there was because that was not the question. The question was not about what Mr. Prince sold. It was about what Mr. Chrétien sold, which was approximately—

The Speaker: Order, please. I think the hon. member knows that she cannot refer to other hon. members by name. I would invite her to comply with the rules in that respect.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, what happened to the other approximately 3% of the shares that were not in this agreement drawn up by two sophisticated lawyers? Could the Deputy Prime Minister shed any light on that question?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agreement between the Prime Minister's company and Mr. Prince's company was intended and did cover all the shares owned by the Prime Minister.

The agreement between Mr. Prince's company and Mr. Michaud's company in turn sold those shares to Mr. Michaud's company. There is no missing 3%. It is a figment of the hon. member's imagination.

*Oral Questions**[Translation]*

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, just so everyone understands, I will provide an example.

If a person sold his house in 1993, he has no interest in its resale six years later, unless he held the mortgage, a lien, or some interest in the property.

Is the Prime Minister, because of his involvement in the 1999 sale, not confirming in writing the fact that he still had interests in the Grand-Mère golf club in 1999?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, about 1 o'clock today fire trucks pulled up to the building and we all left the building. As it turned out the incident was like question period. There was neither smoke nor fire.

[Translation]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is the sort of response that would do well in a fire sale.

The Prime Minister has said on a number of occasions in the House that he had not owned shares in the golf club since 1993.

• (1435)

In 1999, by being party to the agreement, he acknowledged he still had an interest in his shares of the Grand-Mère golf club.

How does he explain the obvious contradiction between his word and his signature?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has had no interest in and no ownership of the golf course since November 1993. What he did have was an interest in being paid for the shares that he sold in November 1993. What his agent achieved in 1999 was payment for those shares.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister told the House on Tuesday that his lawyer, Debbie Weinstein, was "my trustee with another person because we all have two trustees for managing our assets".

Will the government tell us the name of the second trustee and what his or her role was in the Grand-Mère golf club deal?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all those questions have been dealt with by the ethics counsellor who, on behalf of members of cabinet and 1,400 public officials, manages all confidential information on behalf of all those who are required to file with the ethics counsellor.

We are not going to get up in the House and start going through every file of every official, including the Prime Minister, simply because questions are being asked.

I am surprised that we have not been asked yet today whether the Prime Minister puts his pants on one leg at a time.

Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that is another non-answer from the industry minister. Let us try again.

The minister is responsible for the Canadian Business Corporations Act. For over a week we have been asking him whether the Grand-Mère Golf Club followed the rules, but he has been dancing and evading that question. The letter from the head of his corporations branch says that the corporate records will have to be altered retroactively to be brought into compliance with the act.

Will the minister simply answer my question? With regard to the corporate registry of these shares, did the Grand-Mère Golf Club break the law?

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, an examination has been completed of those corporate records. The direction has been given with respect to the information that must be filed. Once that information is filed it is made public and available to everybody in Canada.

With respect to that examination, it has been carried out under the supervision of the deputy minister of industry whose reputation for integrity, I assume all members would agree, is completely above reproach.

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has said that the lawyers put everything necessary into the 1999 agreement. This is true, even a clause to compensate purchaser Michaud in the event of legal proceedings. This guarantee of compensation was given by the Prime Minister himself.

Since when does someone who claims to no longer have an interest in a business intervene in a transaction offer to pay the costs of any potential lawsuit?

[English]

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my understanding that these documents represented what lawyers felt were necessary to end the matter in a full and final way through, what I guess lawyers call, an abundance of caution.

This does not change the fact that the Prime Minister sold the shares in November 1993 before he became Prime Minister and that it was Mr. Prince who had the full ownership of all the shares the Prime Minister owned before November 1993, who in turn sold them turn to Mr. Michaud. Those are the facts of the matter.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear about this.

In 1999, the Prime Minister signed an agreement stating that he would pay any compensation arising out of any proceedings. If he agreed to such a clause, it is because he was still the owner of the shares. He was not just acting out of the goodness of his heart.

Do we not have here one more proof that the Prime Minister was still an owner in 1999?

[English]

Hon. Brian Tobin (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member says "Let us be clear, the Prime Minister signed an agreement in 1999". The Prime Minister did not sign an agreement in 1999. Madam Weinstein, acting on behalf of the Prime Minister, with complete authority to act independently of the Prime Minister, negotiated and concluded that arrangement and informed the Prime Minister after the arrangement was concluded.

* * *

MULTICULTURALISM

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the junior minister of multiculturalism has scoured the country looking for cross burning incidents to justify her slander of British Columbia's cities. There was one, but it was not done by the KKK or by racists. No, it was members of a radical feminist organization, supported by the minister, who burned crosses on the steps of a Roman Catholic cathedral last March.

● (1440)

Why did the junior minister not speak up about that real hate crime, not the invented one that she has been speaking about recently?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. We will have some order so we can hear the minister's response.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have laryngitis so I apologize if my voice is not heard.

I do not know what the member is alluding to and therefore I cannot make any comments.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, these cross burnings and desecrations occurred at a place of worship in Montreal in March 2000 on International Women's Day. The junior minister used taxpayer money for these women to take action "collectively". In her press kit she said

"every action counts". Action happened that day in Montreal, that is for sure.

Why does she not accept those real cross burnings and denounce the ones that are imaginary?

Hon. Hedy Fry (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism)(Status of Women), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, I will not make a comment on something that I know nothing about.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order, please. We are losing time in question period.

* * *

[Translation]

ORGANIZED CRIME

Ms. Diane St-Jacques (Shefford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday various police forces carried out arrests and searches relating to biker gang members and premises.

Since the opposition has not had the time for several weeks to deal with any real questions on matters of great public concern, we in the Liberal caucus have heeded the urgings of the various police forces and the people in our ridings for further action to be taken in the battle against organized crime.

Can the Minister of Justice tell us what measures the government plans to take in response to these urgent pleas from the public?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we would all agree in the House that the decisive action of the Sûreté du Québec, the RCMP and other police forces yesterday speaks to how effectively law enforcement agencies and government can work together to combat organized crime.

While it is clear that our anti-gang legislation is working successfully, we all know there is more we can do.

Let me congratulate the all party subcommittee on organized crime for the work it has done. The government is considering its recommendations, along with consultations we have undertaken. We will be introducing new legislative changes to provide police and prosecutors with new tools to break the back of organized crime.

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FISHERIES

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Royal Society of Canada came out with a report the other day regarding the concerns they have

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expressed over genetically engineered or transgenic fish. Many commercial fishermen and their coastal communities are very concerned if this type of fish ever hits the commercial market.

My question is for the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. What is the government doing on the recommendations in the report of the Royal Society? What is the minister and his department doing to protect the interests of commercial fishermen and the wild salmon stocks in Atlantic Canada?

Hon. Herb Dhaliwal (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me inform the House that I had announced yesterday that for the third year in a row our exports of fish and seafood products are at \$4.1 billion.

As the hon. member knows, the Government of Canada asked the Royal Society to look at some of these important issues on transgenic and food biotechnology. We want to make sure that we review that very closely with all government departments and make sure we respond. This is an issue that is very important for all Canadians.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the *Financial Post* advertised jobs at a Vermont hospital, offering Canadian nurses a \$2,000 sign on bonus and other benefits.

• (1445)

In Canada, where the nursing shortage is critical, there is no national strategy, not even recognition of the problem. Witness the recent words of a Canadian immigration official who said unfortunately the occupational demand for nurses is zero.

When will the government get a grip on reality and address the critical nursing shortage in Canada today?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Charbonneau (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as everyone knows, the training of health personnel is mainly a provincial responsibility, but it is also an area of federal-provincial co-operation.

A committee meets regularly to address these questions, and this was given as a major area of concern at all levels during last September's federal-provincial conference. The various levels of government are, therefore, working together to deal with such problems.

* * *

[English]

LUMBER INDUSTRY

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, as we enter into the urgent negotiations with the United States on

softwood lumber, we now have at least four or five completely divergent positions in Canada.

The fact is the Minister for International Trade has failed to get consensus from the industry. Yesterday top industrialists in Canada pleaded with the minister to convene a meeting of all the softwood lumber interests to try to get consensus.

Will the government and the minister agree to that request by the industry and convene a meeting to try to get consensus, even at this late date?

Mr. Pat O'Brien (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, earlier today the member for Ottawa Centre tabled a report in the House from the subcommittee on trade, endorsed by the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade, which calls on the Government of Canada to appoint an envoy. The envoy would have the opportunity to convene such a meeting as the member describes.

I am a bit surprised by the member's question because he was a full participant and supported the committee's decision yesterday.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Washington based coalition for fair lumber import into the United States has excluded Atlantic Canada from the impending countervailing duty charges to be launched by the U.S. government. The exclusion is in recognition of the lumbering practices of Atlantic Canada, and at least 72,000 woodlot owners.

In the event that the Canadian government imposes an export tax, will the government provide the same recognition and exclusion for Atlantic Canada and those woodlot owners as the Americans have?

Mr. Pat O'Brien (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the Minister for International Trade announced that we will be implementing a monitoring of all exports of softwood lumber to the United States.

Effective April 1, there will be the use of export permits which will allow us to collect some very important data to once again validate the case that Canada has demonstrated several times in the past, that we do not subsidize exports in softwood lumber.

* * *

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is in denial of the disgraceful conduct of his Secretary of State for Multiculturalism. Every major newspaper in the country, anti-racism activists, the mayor of the city she slandered, and even members of the Liberal caucus have said that her forced half-baked apology is not good enough.

Oral Questions

Why does she not recognize that she simply cannot continue to function in her position, that she does not have any credibility left, and just resign?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. secretary of state confirmed she made a mistake in the things she said. She apologized fully for the mistake.

I do not see why we do not follow the usual conventions dating back 100 years in the House, that when a member says he or she made a mistake and apologizes it should be accepted.

The hon. secretary of state is fully committed to fighting against racism and discrimination. Let us all join with her in this necessary fight.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the odious remarks of the junior minister for multiculturalism are nothing new.

How could the Prime Minister have confidence in a minister whose job is to promote tolerance when she has a track record of promoting intolerance and division? The only thing she needs to know is that she must resign.

• (1450)

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. friend did not listen. He does not have the courtesy to say why he and his party are not willing to follow the same conventions they expected us to assume when the member from Calgary misled a radio station in the way he did.

My hon. friend should be willing to accept the conventions of the House with respect to the secretary of state in the same way he and his party expect us to do with respect to the person who apparently thought that running a coffee shop was more important than his duties to the House.

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[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for the 1993-1999 period, neither the Prime Minister nor Jonas Prince wants to assume responsibility for the shares in the golf club. The Prime Minister claims that he had sold his shares, while Mr. Prince contends that he had not bought anything.

If the Prime Minister did indeed sell his shares in 1993, how does he explain that article 2.3 of the 1999 agreement provides that it is the Prime Minister's company, not Jonas Prince's company, that waives any recourse should the transfer of shares not be approved? How could the Prime Minister waive something in 1999 if he was no longer in the picture after 1993?

[English]

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we look at the agreement dated September 29, 1999, between Prince's company Park Inns and Michaud's company, Placements Michaud, it starts out saying that Akimbo Development purchased from J&AC all the shares in consideration of the terms set out in the agreement. When it talks about all the shares, it refers to the agreement of November 1, 1993.

The hon. member and his party said that if the agreement of November 1, 1993, was tabled it would end the matter. Why do they not live up to their own words?

[Translation]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is because it is full of contradictions. The Deputy Prime Minister should take a look at the 1999 agreement.

Article 2.1 provides that the Prime Minister waives his ownership rights over the shares. This means he had to have them in order to sell them. Under article 2.2, he provides the seller's guarantee. Again, something must be sold in order to provide such a guarantee. Under article 2.3, he waives his right to any recourse, while in article 3.6 he says "I will pay if there are legal proceedings against Michaud".

In other words, his friend Michaud is saying to him "I am prepared to give you money, Mr. Prime Minister, but I am not prepared to pay for your mistakes".

In light of all this, how can we not conclude that a conflict of interest exists?

[English]

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the agreement of 1999 also said that Akimbo received legal advice that Akimbo "retained legal title to the shares since November 1, 1993".

If the hon. member wants to read the document, let him read all of it. Let him also live up to his commitment that if the sales agreement were tabled he would drop the matter. Where are his ethics? Why does he not live up to his undertaking?

* * *

MULTICULTURALISM

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, senior government officials have been quoted as saying that the discredited Secretary of State for Multiculturalism was forced by the Prime Minister's

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Office to make her half-hearted apology to Prince George for fabricating cross burnings there.

We now know that she held back on that carefully scripted statement as long as possible while her staff frantically tried to get the police to justify her outrageous comments, but she has never, I repeat never, apologized for saying that crosses were being burned outside Kamloops. Nor has she attempted to explain those comments.

I have given the minister four opportunities to explain herself and apologize—

The Speaker: The hon. the Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, when I referred to a member from Calgary running his coffee shop, I should have mentioned a member from Edmonton.

Second, if the member gave the hon. secretary of state four opportunities to say something about what she did, she did not listen four times when the hon. secretary of state certainly confirmed, as did myself and the Prime Minister, that she recognized she made a mistake and she apologized.

Four times in a row the hon. member has shown no sense of ethics when she refused to live by the conventions of the House that when a member says she made a mistake and apologizes we should all accept that and move on to doing the business of the House.

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, a ministerial position is far more important than the person who happens to hold it at any given time. It is a position of trust.

When the behaviour of a minister is reckless, intolerant and apparently without ethics, the House should rise as one to condemn the behaviour and demand the resignation of the offending minister. That is to protect the integrity of the House.

• (1455)

I ask the Prime Minister to heed the call of my constituents and the minister's own constituents to remove her from this very sensitive multicultural position.

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the House should rise as one and chastise the hon. member for not accepting the conventions of the House that when a member says he or she has made a mistake and apologizes all sides of the House accept that.

Where are her ethics? Why does she not rise and apologize for not living by the traditions and conventions of the House?

HEALTH

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while stem cell research can potentially provide useful therapies in a wide variety of health conditions and diseases, there are extremely difficult ethical and legal issues surrounding the use of human embryonic and fetal tissue in research.

In the absence of meaningful policy questions from the opposition, I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health what the government is doing to address Canada's lack of guidelines in this important area.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Charbonneau (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just today, a working committee of the health research institute released a paper on stem cells of human origin.

This is a major step forward. This document will help researchers and will also serve as a discussion paper in the coming months. This will allow us to move forward in a more cautious and informed manner in the public dialogue that we are beginning today.

* * *

[*English*]

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in the Deputy Prime Minister's response he has in fact accepted and condoned the shame and embarrassment that the junior minister of multiculturalism has brought upon her office, the government and the House of Commons. It is revolting for the Deputy Prime Minister to accept that.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister and his colleagues demand the firing of that minister of multiculturalism today instead of waiting until the summer?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not condone any questionable conduct from any member on any side of the House.

In particular, I do not condone the unjustified attacks on the hon. secretary of state after she admitted she made a mistake, after she apologized. I do not condone his lack of ethics and his lack of willingness to accept the conventions and traditions of the House.

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the junior minister for multiculturalism fabricated a story about a cross burning incident in Prince George and one in Kamloops. She fabricated a response about her office not calling the RCMP looking for evidence to back up her fabrications. She has misled the House on three occasions.

Privilege

What does it take for the Prime Minister and for his colleagues in government to demand her resignation? How much more shame and embarrassment is needed before they will do that?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thought the hon. member would start off by attacking and criticizing his colleague for fabricating his radio interview. That is where he should have started. I think he ought to deal with that issue before turning to anybody else.

* * *

[Translation]

PRIME MINISTER

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of article 3.6 of the 1999 agreement is to protect the buyer, Mr. Michaud, against any future legal proceedings. This clause exists because, even for Mr. Michaud, there is a limit to helping out one's friends.

Will the Prime Minister admit that the reason he does not want an inquiry is that he will have to foot the bill, which puts him in a second conflict of interest situation?

Hon. Herb Gray (Deputy Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the hon. member has no confidence in his party's former House leader, the member for Roberval, when he says about the record of sale "Let him provide that, and the problem will be over".

Why does he not accept the words of his own colleague, the member for Roberval?

* * *

• (1500)

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of three distinguished visitors today. Perhaps hon. members could refrain from applauding until all three have been introduced. The first is His Excellency Aleke Banda, Minister of Health & Population of Malawi. The second is the Hon. Mosiuoa Gerard Patrick Lekota, Minister of National Defence of the Republic of South Africa. The third is His Excellency Sandor Pinter, Minister of the Interior of the Republic of Hungary.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, may I ask the House leader what is on the agenda for

next week and the coming weeks. He has talked about water, but I am sure there are other important things he could share with us today.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue consideration of Bill C-2, the employment insurance bill. We will then return to the second reading of Bill C-18, the equalization bill. That will be followed by Bill C-17 respecting the innovation foundation.

On Friday we will consider third reading of Bill C-8, the financial institution, and if necessary we will return to Bill C-18.

[Translation]

On Monday, we will return to Bill C-2. If it is completed at report stage, we will return to Bill C-18, C-17 or C-22 on the Income Tax Act, depending on which of these bills requires further consideration.

Tuesday shall be an allotted day, and I believe it is the Canadian Alliance's turn. On Wednesday, we will return to Bill C-2. We will also try to complete third reading of Bill C-12, the Judges Act amendments, and Bill C-9, the elections bill. If we have the time, I will also suggest completing Bill C-4, respecting the Sustainable Development Foundation, before adjourning for Easter.

* * *

[English]

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question of privilege with regard to a committee matter that is so unique and extraordinary that I must bring it directly to the attention of the House.

My question of privilege charges the chair of the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology with contempt. This morning at the standing committee's meeting, the chair abused her authority by ruling out of order a motion concerning her decisions as chair of the committee. Such motions are in order.

Referring to Marleau and Montpetit, on page 858 it states:

Disorder and misconduct in a committee may arise as a result of the failure to abide by the rules and practices of a committee. . . If a committee desires that some action be taken. . . it must report the situation to the House. The House may make a decision on disorder upon receiving such a report.

That is exactly what I was attempting to do. How can the committee comply with the practices of the House if the chair rules such motions out of order? What I find most objectionable is the fact that the motion was concerning the actions of the chair.

Points of Order

● (1505)

The motion was to report to the House the matter of the chair's rulings regarding numerous motions concerning the ethics counselor to the House. Her refusal to allow a motion to report her own actions to the House is a conflict of interest and impedes the committee from being master of its own proceedings.

I would gladly ask the committee to report this conflict of interest to the House, but the chair, based on her decision today, does not entertain motions concerning her decisions. As you can see, Mr. Speaker, my only recourse is to bring the matter to the House directly.

The House is entitled to all reports and has a duty to deal with contempts or misconducts that occur in committee. Since that is not possible, since the chair has impeded the committee's ability to decide to report the matter to the House, I must submit the chair's actions directly to the House. The chair's rulings regarding certain motions were biased and inconsistent with the practices of the House.

The final motion she disallowed was a motion to report her rulings to the House. That goes to the very heart of the question of privilege. The member cannot procedurally or legitimately disallow a motion that might jeopardize her position as chair. She cannot silence criticism against her authority and refuse to implement the wishes of those who elected her.

On page 119 of Erskine May there is a reference regarding a select committee that was appointed in 1977 to inquire into the conduct and activities of members and to consider whether any such conduct or activities amounted to a contempt of the House and whether any such activities were "conduct inconsistent with the standards the House was entitled to expect from its members".

I consider the chair's decisions at the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to be conduct inconsistent with the standards that the House and the public expect from a member.

There is a great deal at stake here. We cannot let the matter go unresolved. The hon. member for Essex must be found in contempt by the House. While my rights as a member of the standing committee are immediately at stake, ultimately the threat is to the democratic rights and freedoms of all members of the House.

The member is contributing to the inability of the House to resolve the matter of the appearance of a conflict of interest regarding the Prime Minister's involvement with the Grand-Mère Golf Club and Grand-Mère Inn.

Her role as chair is not to protect the Prime Minister but to protect the rights of all members of the committee and to uphold the rules and practices of the House. In that regard she has failed, and she has no right to impede my efforts to report those decisions to the House.

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue we are referring to

occurred over two days. In the first incident some members of the committee attempted to bring in witnesses to review the activities of a member of the House. Obviously members know that cannot be done. It is quite clear under our rules and under Maingot's advice that one cannot do that. At the first meeting the chair ruled that was out of order and that was sustained.

At the second meeting, the information I have is that an hon. member who was dissatisfied with both the ruling at first reading and the sustaining of the chair's ruling tried to bring a motion to report that to the House. When that was ruled out of order by the committee chair the ruling was appealed.

The hon. member has failed to indicate that the ruling he refers to was appealed and that the appeal was sustained by a vote of the committee. He neglected, either skilfully or perhaps he forgot, that very important element. The ruling was sustained. I suggest that this issue should not be before the House at all.

The Speaker: I do not think the Chair need hear any more on this point. The point appears to me to be clear. I received the letter from the hon. member for Edmonton Southwest and have heard his arguments. I have heard the arguments put forward by the hon. government House leader.

Certainly the committee is master of its own procedure. The fact that the committee made a decision to uphold the decision of its chair renders it impossible for this Chair to intervene.

● (1510)

If the committee, being master of its own procedure, has decided that is the way it wishes to proceed, I do not believe it is in order for the hon. member to come to the House under the guise of a question of privilege and attempt to challenge the ruling of the chairman of the committee. In the circumstances, I find there is no question of privilege raised here.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have something to which the Chair and the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism should be made aware given the events of last week.

I would like to table the secretary of state's press release dated March 8, 2000. It may help her to answer a question I asked her in question period. Her response to the question I had asked was "I do not know what the member is alluding to". Her response to my second question was "I will not make a comment on something that I know nothing about".

We would find that hard to believe.

Government Orders

The Speaker: It does not sound like a point of order to me. This sounds like an argument. The hon. member for Edmonton North is requesting consent to table some documents. Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Ms. Judy Wasylcia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during question period I referenced a letter signed by a Canadian immigration official, dated March 6, 2001, which clearly stated "Unfortunately, the occupational demand for a nurse is currently zero". I would like to seek unanimous consent from the House to table the letter.

The Speaker: Is there consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Derek Lee: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I am tempting fate a little bit here, but there have been consultations and I think you might find unanimous consent to revert to presenting reports from committees for the purpose of introducing a report from the procedure and House affairs committee on votable items.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to presenting reports from committees?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Fishing) Regulations, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No.1.

Mr. Robert Lanctôt (Châteauguay, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I was interrupted for question period. This bill is so important that I have to carry on with the debate.

However, I would like to propose a motion. Whereas the integrity of the Prime Minister is of the utmost importance and whereas we have been unable to obtain any answer from the government, I move:

That the House do now adjourn.

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1555)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 60)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 10th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the selection of votable items. In accordance with Standing Order 92, this report is deemed adopted on presentation.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-2, an act to amend the Employment Insurance Act and the Employment Insurance

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bailey	Benoit
Bergeron	Bigras
Blaikie	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brien
Brisson	Burton
Cadman	Cardin
Casey	Casson
Chatters	Clark
Comartin	Crête
Dalphond-Guiral	Davies
Day	Dubé
Duceppe	Duncan
Epp	Fitzpatrick
Forseth	Fournier
Gagnon (Québec)	Gallant
Gauthier	Godin
Goldring	Grewal
Grey (Edmonton North)	Guay
Hanger	Harris
Hearn	Herron
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hilstrom
Hinton	Jaffer
Johnston	Keddy (South Shore)
Kenny (Calgary Southeast)	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lanctôt
Lill	Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Manning	Mark

Government Orders

Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McNally
Merrifield
Moore
Obhrai
Perron
Picard (Drummond)
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Rocheleau
Sauvageau
Skelton
Sorenson
Stinson
Strahl
Toews
Vellacott
Wasylcia-Leis
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Williams

Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)
Nystrom
Paquette
Peschisolido
Proctor
Ritz
Roy
Schmidt
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Owen
Paradis
Price
Provenzano
Regan
Robillard
Savoy
Scott
Speller
St-Jacques
Stewart
Thibault (West Nova)
Tonks

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Assad
Baker
Beaumier
Bellemare
Binet
Boudria
Bryden
Byrne
Cannis
Catterall
Coderre
Cullen
DeVillers
Dion
Duplain
Finlay
Fry
Godfrey
Graham
Grose
Harvard
Hubbard

Allard
Bagnell
Barnes
Bélanger
Bennett
Blondin-Andrew
Brown
Bulte
Calder
Castonguay
Charbonneau
Collenette
Cuzner
Dhaliwal
Duhamel
Eggleton
Folco
Gagliano
Goodale
Gray (Windsor West)
Harb
Harvey
Jackson

PAIRED MEMBERS

*Nil/aucun

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 3.58 p.m.)

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