

Government Orders

What is the government's policy to deal with major closures in single industry towns like Ignace? We also know in the province of Ontario that there are going to be other mines, with large work forces, that will shut down in the near future. What is the government going to do when that inevitable situation occurs? It cannot continually say that is too bad.

There must be a policy, an initiative, so that we are ready to deal with those individuals who happen to be 25, 35, 45, and be prepared to do something and not say: "Go on UI until it runs out", or in this case, because of the simple little change the government made, tell them to use up all their severance, and in some cases the only savings they have, which takes a good year, and then go on UI for another year, and then maybe convince them to go into some sort of training program—if there is anything available.

That is the issue we are dealing with. The \$3.8 billion figure is a nice number. It sounds really good, but does it meet the needs of Canadians when there are four million Canadians sitting at home wondering if they will ever work again?

It would if this government could say to us that eventually over time, with its policies, it believes that unemployment will be 6 per cent and showed us how many people will be working and trained, if it said: "These are the demographics and how it is all structured". However, that is not what we are hearing. We are hearing that there is restructuring, period, and because of that restructuring there are going to be some very difficult times which will have to be accepted.

I do not think Canadians are prepared to accept that, and the government will see in the next election that they are not. They want initiatives by their members of Parliament, by governments at all levels, that will make the economy grow but at the same time give them some hope.

Hon. John McDermid (Minister of State (Finance and Privatization)): Mr. Speaker, today's opposition motion condemns our government for adhering to its economic policies and clearly suggests that our policies are the source of Canada's slow growth and industrial difficulties.

There are at least two clear and basic problems with that simplistic and self-serving attack.

First, it implies that Canada is somehow isolated from today's global economy, that we are this little island in the northern hemisphere that can crawl into its shell and not pay attention to what is going on around the world.

Second, it tries to suggest that the government is doing little or nothing to help the economy and the people who are facing hardship.

Let me point out that by using the phrase "trickle down" the hon. member's motion is obviously trying to equate our policies with those of the administrations of the United States. What the hon. member ignores, and I believe clearly hopes that Canadians will not realize, is that in Canada the federal government already plays a more involved role in the economy than does the federal government of the United States.

My hon. friend from Hamilton East used an excess of verbiage this morning. She was quoting the Minister of Finance to the people of Canada. She attributed to him a number of statements that obviously the Minister of Finance has never, ever uttered. I want the hon. member to produce those quotes to the House, all those things she attributed to the Minister of Finance today. Anyone who knows the Minister of Finance knows that he would not make the statements the hon. member attributed to him this morning.

Let me return to the main issue here. We all realize that Canada is only slowly recovering from what has been a very painful and prolonged recession. The economy is still weak and unemployment is much too high. People in businesses everywhere are feeling the painful consequences. It is also true that only by recognizing the underlying causes behind our difficulties, the interplay of global pressures and Canada's competitive ability, can any government implement effective policies to win firm and lasting economic success and security. That is the basis of the policies we have put in place.

These are policies that look ahead to Canada's medium term needs rather than superficial quick fixes. This is where we differ so dramatically from the opposition. What little economic plan it offers seems to emphasize nothing but supposed quick fixes. Of course that should be no surprise. It was its emphasis on short-term crutches in past periods of economic difficulty that helped diminish our competitive muscle and has left Canada so vulnerable to economic weaknesses today. That is the opposition's legacy and its formula again for the future.