

Government Orders

period of time with the assurance from the employer that everything would be fine. It was a temporary rough period, but once the finances were in order everything would be okay and the employees would be paid.

Now with the wage change differences, those wages add up, and they add up rather rapidly. If you look at just the wage alone it does not take very much to get up over the \$2,000 level when you are earning \$500 or \$800 a week and you have set back your wages over that period of time.

The employee, the average worker, cannot afford to give up that type of money.

I look at this particular proposal that the minister has put forward. On the top of it, 10 cents a week an employee does not seem to be that much of a hardship. But talk to the small business community, not just the Canadian Federation of Independent Business. I had letters from Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing riding, some from my own riding, some from the maritimes, pointing out some of the problems that small business is having in this country and making a go of it. Certainly the minister has looked at the bankruptcy figures over the last year and a half. One of the government members has pointed out that things have improved over last year. It is an improvement over complete decimation of a small business community and although it is somewhat encouraging, we do not have a solid small business community. It does not point to that.

It points to major problems within the business community. Business people tell us, and have told me with some emphasis, that they are being taxed to death. The increase in UI was one of the nails in the coffin of small business.

The GST, in spite of what the Minister of National Revenue has told us, is not only hurting small business. Over the summer I spoke to presidents and board members of some major corporations within my riding. It is hurting them.

The monetary and fiscal policies of this government, the high interest rates and the high dollar rate are all hurting small business. Add, on top of fuel taxes et cetera, a further levy under this plan of the minister and

it simply starts to add up to the point where it becomes the straw that breaks the proverbial camel's back.

Small business cannot take any more. It has looked hard for ways around it. It seems to me that the way out is a super priority. The Government of Ontario has set up a fund. It has looked at what it would cost and set up a fund of \$175 million as a seed.

There is a proposal that this would bring in something like \$61 million as the seed of the fund. The member for Mississauga South and the member for Nickel Belt have pointed out the problems that we have with the employees of the walkaways who do not have the money to go into bankruptcy or receivership.

The employees are hurt. We have a situation where if the government would examine core funding for a program it seems to me that it would protect the employees of the walkaways. It would protect those within the system so that as employees were placed out of work with moneys owing they could take money out of the fund immediately so that their families are not put into hardship. Their rights would then be subrogated to the federal government or the superintendent of bankruptcies, whoever administered the fund.

Through the subrogation their rights would then take priority over everybody including, and I walk on very thin ice here, the trustee in bankruptcy. The wages of the employees who have kept their employers going should have priority over all other creditors, whether they be preferred, secured or Crown creditors. Employees should come first.

I cannot emphasize enough that it is simply not good enough to say that employees will not have priority. That is something that should be looked at. It is something that should be looked at hard and fast. The rule as set out here simply sets up a fund that will be funded by an already overtaxed small business and business community. That is not good enough.

We must have a commitment from this government that the employees will be looked after in a manner that assures that they will be paid immediately and that the setting up of a fund for that payment will not hurt the business community by imposing further taxation.