

*Government Orders*

[English]

In the spring I had proposed that we should establish a standing committee on the Constitution. Clearly, this would have been a way, since the repatriation of the Constitution, to have continued the dialogue and initiated dialogue throughout Canada. That was not done then. That was not done when I suggested it again to this government in the spring. Again, I would urge the Prime Minister and his government to consider the establishment of a standing committee on the Constitution so that members of Parliament also can be continuing to work on the Constitution of our country.

As I said, it is not simply enough for a group of Canadians to travel the country, but to find ways to bring people together in our country. I talked about the cuts to the CBC. I could have mentioned also the cuts to VIA Rail, which is another way from east to west that maintained some unity in our country.

This government has cut exchange programs from high school students. These are the things that bring people together. We should be developing initiatives for our young people to meet each other and have a dialogue, not simply to cut them back.

It is also a government that has cut aboriginal communications and women's groups communications. The government must be consistent here. If the government is truly dedicated to promoting Canadian unity, yes, it is the Constitution that is important, but it is just as important to make sure that groups can communicate with one another and that we can come to know each other.

There are other problems that are creating a lack of unity in this country today; that is, the economic situation of this country. The trade deal with the United States and the proposed trade deal with Mexico has already caused the loss of some 165,000 jobs in Canada. Every day, we read of yet another series of lay-offs: hundreds, and sometimes in the thousands.

The Prime Minister said that we are a rich country. I agree. As a rich country, we must hang our head in shame, and this government must hang its head in shame when one in six of our children still lives in poverty, when rural communities on the west and east coasts, and in central Canada, are being devastated by the economic policies of this government.

We know that in this country small business is one of the greatest creators of job opportunities. Yet small business itself is being devastated by the economic policies of this government. This is not the action of a government dedicated to unity. We must redress the imbalance in our economic system.

I say to the Prime Minister: Regional discontent in Canada, the disparity between the rich and poor does not simply lie with the constitutional structure. It is a product of economic and social policies. During the trade debate, we were very clear in this party about our concern for our natural resources, for our renewable resources and non-renewable resources.

We were very concerned about protecting the social programs. What has happened? Unemployment insurance has been privatized. Fish stocks have been devastated. Environmental review has really just become a shell and not a real environmental review. Things that will bring this country together are the shared and common values, as the other speakers have said, but those shared and common values must be represented as well by a shared and common responsibility, and a government that will stand up for the public interest, the public good and listen to all Canadians, and not just to the corporate voice.

How can we have fairness? How can we have unity in this country when women still are not paid equally with men, we still do not have adequate child care for our children nor, in fact, for many children even the basic necessities of life, shelter and food? How can unity be promoted in this country when every day there are more unemployed, more of our Canadian heritage is being sold to foreign interests and our sovereignty is compromised by another country?

This government has no full employment policy. In fact, in subsequent budgets the government has shown what the level of unemployment will be. Of course it has always underestimated it.

• (1630)

However, if this government were committed to Canadians and the Canadian interest, we would see policies of full employment. We would see policies of putting the environment before the interest of profit. We would see a government that says: "We are going to stand up for the public interest. We are not going to sell off Petro-Canada. We are not going to try to sell it back to Canadians and then sell a percentage to foreign owners. We are going to say that Canadian resources belong to