

Bill C-113 is a tired, rather pitiful piece of theatre with a rather malevolent edge. It has no redeeming features. It is punitive, attacking the weak — often women, often immigrants — with a curious additional feature for a modern western democracy, that one is guilty until proven innocent. Such theatre may have attracted huge crowds in Elizabethan England; it would have been a sell-out in the days of the English poor laws, but it has little cultural or social attractiveness in Canada in the 1990s. It really leaves the theatre owners as impoverished as before.

Even with the cuts envisaged in Bill C-113, the deficit in the UI fund is expected to rise to \$7.6 billion by the end of 1993. If anything, Canada is rich in sanity because the audience largely left at the intermission. The alternatives were clear: Stay to be bombarded with precepts of another age and the tired melodrama of actors trained in the jargon of irrelevance, or exit, facing further reflection on the politics of the absurd. The crowd chose sanity. The exits were, and are, clogged.

The real drama lies elsewhere. The real drama is about unemployment. It is not really about quitters, although they, not the cheaters, are the focus of present policy. The real drama is about unemployment and it is a heart-wrenching spectacle. It plays out in theatres across the land to a nation whose citizens, whose human resource, whose collective will and whose morale has been sapped. It attracts large audiences because every Canadian family has been affected by it. Nearly every community, if not troubled by it, has been ravaged by it. It has had a lengthy run in theatres across the land. Our present government has secured it a central place in our cultural panoply. It has become almost a religious institution. It has become the government's largest single expenditure. At \$22.5 billion, the spectacle now costs more than national defence or old age security.

As an Atlantic Canadian who has watched this spectacle thousands of times in dozens of communities, the real drama is about a nation which has lost its sense of conviction and its sense of purpose. The sense of power, of exhilaration and adventure — all that has vacated the Canadian venue. The lights of our communities are growing dimmer, the foundations are cracking and the government lacks the will to repair them.

A job is not only a means of living, it is central to our sense of self-respect, of dignity, of belonging. Indeed, it is our life-line. The lack of a job means more than just a lack of money. It means the loss of basic human tools, be they psychological or social; tools that we need to make things happen. Under this government, those tools are rusting away. The present government has ignored the problem and claimed the deficit as its defence. They have remained consistent on this point, honourable senators.

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They have marginalized a nation and humiliated our human resources. We are a nation which has demonstrated a decline into underdevelopment. The statistics speak of underinvestment in productivity, underinvestment in economic productivity, underinvestment in social productivity.

Those statistics speak of our demoralization. They speak of a nation in which food banks have been accepted as a birthright, in which illiteracy has become a legacy, in which unemployment is a kind of patrimony. We are told that global economic trends — we are buffeted continually with the concept of globalization — dictate our future.

There is a certain grim logic for the adherence to this view. We are told that Canadians must become more efficient, more productive. We are told we must plan consensually, like the Japanese. While Canadians might prefer a less adversarial political system and a more consensual decision-making process, they are not given any clues as to how to arrive at this by the disciples of globalization.

For those who have lost jobs or whose jobs are threatened by free trade, by international competition or technological change, there is little consolation in the thought that, in time, we may become, through the collaborative policy processes, more like the Japanese or the Germans.

I am all in favour of greater productivity and the creation of knowledge-intensive zones in Canada because that is what will attract the investment of new-age businesses. However, I do not know how we will adapt to the new age with institutional arrangements. As I said before, a whole religious hierarchy which is dedicated with a real sense of mission, as zealots are, to ruling out inflation, so much so that I believe they often lie awake at night, beleaguered by the spectre of inflation and imagining that perhaps two million workers, rather than one million, must be sacrificed for the faith.

I do not know how we will adapt to the new age with institutional arrangements which have generated a low capacity to deal with unemployment and a passive acceptance of its permanent national presence at about 10 per cent. These arrangements have bred powerlessness throughout the land. They have demoralized our people. Canada is now a high unemployment nation. I remind honourable senators that, while the national average today is 11.1 per cent, the unemployment rate in my home area of Cape Breton is an appalling 28.5 per cent. The unofficial rate must be well over 40 per cent. Just come to Cape Breton and dare talk about quitters.