

*Government Orders*

● (1115)

The number of people who may have to rely on unemployment insurance is growing. I met one of them this week, he is not young, although many young people are affected too. He is a teacher with 20 years of experience, who has never enjoyed job security and is now unemployed in spite of having 23 years of schooling. He is extremely angry because when you are unemployed you feel as if society has no respect for human beings.

Right now, how many people are in the same situation? Do not tell me that the budget as a whole gives Canadians hope for the future. In what way, may I ask? First they cut, and then they ask us to believe them.

My colleague opposite who, a while ago, mentioned instability, reminds me of a pyromaniac who starts a fire and then bemoans the fact that it is burning. With its measures, this government is not rekindling hope for all those who live in a precarious situation, a situation many know nothing about, a situation so precarious that they end up with no self-respect, that they cannot have a family of their own, and that they do not dare look at people straight in the eyes. Unemployment insurance is a lifeline, and when it is taken away, you drop quite a few notches.

People come to my riding office, in a panic, because their UI benefits are about to end and they may have to go on welfare. They feel as if they were falling into a big black hole. Obviously, we try to encourage them, but what is there to tell them except that the situation is extremely tough and that there are few opportunities?

One wonders what kind of social and economic model forms the basis of this bill. By reducing the payments from 57 to 55 per cent for 85 per cent of the unemployed, and by reducing the number of weeks ever closer to half a year, we are moving towards the American model. Whether we like or not, this is a fact. The truth is that the Canadian unemployment insurance program resembles more and more the American one.

A few days ago, a member from the opposite side was saying: "Even with today's globalization, a country remains the master of its social and economic organization". In reality, the Liberals are pursuing the policies of the Conservatives. Or, putting it another way, the Conservatives, while in power, followed a Liberal policy. Everybody is following the policy of the McDonald report.

I remind members that the McDonald report was produced by a commission chaired by Mr. McDonald who was appointed by Mr. Trudeau. The Conservatives implemented its recommendations and now the Liberals are implementing the last part, the one concerning income security.

We cannot ignore the facts and keep on saying that the new Canadian jobs will be provided by China.

● (1120)

The pretext, heard several times in this Chamber, was that we have to give small and medium-sized businesses a chance. On that point I would like to say to my colleagues opposite that they are stretching the truth a bit. First, I should point out that we were the first, before January, to say that UI premiums should not increase. They were at \$3 and they should have stayed at \$3. We had proposed to freeze premiums. The government did not listen to us. It increased them. Now, it is bragging about the fact that it will lower them to \$3 next January. And it adds—again stretching the truth—that this will create 40,000 jobs.

The fact of the matter is that by raising premiums to \$3.07, the government has made it more difficult to create jobs this year. With Bill C-17, it should at least have had the decency to reduce the UI premium rate to \$3 immediately, if this move could have created jobs.

There are other ways to continue funding unemployment insurance without reducing the benefits of the least fortunate and creating in the process social and economic problems for those regions hardest hit. There are countries that have found alternative solutions. For example, why will the government not consider increasing the average industrial wage through contributions? Such a move would help to fund UI by getting large companies, even those with few blue-collar workers, to contribute without the government having to resort once again to lowering the benefits of the least fortunate and, in the process, creating additional social burdens.

When a government drives people onto welfare and then is forced to invest money supposedly to convince them to leave it behind, then its policies are illogical. Such policies cannot, ultimately, create jobs.

This bill which unfortunately will be adopted shortly is a total disaster. I would like to think that my hon. colleagues will be convinced by our comments directed to all of Canada and to all Canadians of the importance of equity and job creation in Canada.

The government claims to be concerned about child poverty. However, child poverty begins with poverty in the home. Thousands of people are being forced into poverty and, later on, the government will shed crocodile tears regarding their sad fate.

Before concluding my remarks, I would like to point out that one of the many provisions in this bill has not been given a sufficiently high profile—not that we have not tried to focus on it—is the total discretion enjoyed by the minister as far as pilot projects are concerned. Allow me to explain myself.

Pursuant to this bill, when the minister designates a region to be the focus of a pilot project, he alone can decide whether the provisions will not apply to a particular group of citizens, to whom no recourse is available.