

What we have now is a new slogan for Canada. Instead of a new deal for Canada, we have a new slogan—“Liberal times are tough times”. The International Monetary Fund indicated just how tough they are. We are into a negative growth rate period in the country for the first time within the memory of many people.

Mr. Nystrom: The thirties.

Mr. Baker (Nepean-Carleton): I suspect we have not had that kind of situation since before the hon. member for Yorkton-Melville (Mr. Nystrom) was born. That is the kind of inconsistency we face.

The government which says it loves small business is going to help small business through the employment it provides for young people and others. It is going to study again what has already been studied with regard to changes in the legislation and initiatives that could be taken by the government in respect of small business.

It must be dreadful for members opposite to visit their constituencies on the weekend. It must be rough on them. My heart goes out to them. However, my heart goes out also to those people who are the victims of these policies which smack of inconsistency and do damage, not just to this country but to many Canadians who thought when they put this government back in office that something reasonable would be done. That is the situation we find ourselves in and it is under those circumstances that we are considering this bill.

• (1440)

While I have the minister here, I want to put a proposition to him. It is a proposition that he will receive from me in the mail. It deals with some changes that might be made in unemployment insurance legislation and benefits, matters which I suggest are in some respects effecting a discrimination.

I have in my hand a letter dated May 14, 1982, from a constituent of mine, Mrs. M. E. Villeneuve of No. 4. David Drive, Nepean, Ontario. With a number of other people she prepared, had circulated and had signed within the Ottawa-Carleton region a petition that asked for some changes. I believe I can best put the case by reading the letter into the record, because it lays the matter out. In writing to me she said this:

I object to the fact that there are no unemployment benefits for women who go on leave when they adopt a baby.

When a natural mother has a baby and is on maternity leave, she receives unemployment benefits; and Federal Government employees, in certain categories, now receive additional funds from their employing department. Natural mothers are also able to return to their jobs as early as they wish to earn their salary if they financially need to.

Adoptive mothers *must* be off work for a six-month period, a policy of Children's Aid Society, with no benefits from unemployment or from their employing department.

When a couple adopts a child they are taking over a government financial responsibility. People who adopt a child go through so much stress and wait for so long, that they certainly deserve the same privileges as any other parents. In this day and age no one can afford to be off work six months without pay, and I pay my unemployment insurance just like anyone else.

Unemployment Insurance Act, 1971 (No. 2)

I feel this is an extremely unfair situation, and you can see from the attached petition that many other people are against this. There is absolutely no justifiable reason for this, and it is time that the government gave unemployment benefits to adoptive mothers instead of continually increasing natural mothers' benefits.

That is how it appears to that mother in that situation. She concludes:

I request that you present this letter and petition on my behalf to the Minister for his consideration. A reply would be most appreciated.

I can tell the minister that I have written to him today and I also have sent the petition to him today. At the same time, I felt that as we are going to deal with this legislation today in the House vis-à-vis unemployment insurance, I would like to address the matter directly to him today.

I am sure that if he had his way, the programs of the government would be much different. He would not want to go home to Winnipeg every day and defend the banalities of the Minister of Finance to the effect that nothing can be done. I am sure that this is the case with a whole host of backbenchers in his party. That is why there is trouble in the backbenches of the Liberal party, and a great deal of difficulty. I want to say to my friends in the Liberal Party that silence by them, public silence by them, will ensure either one of two things—the continuation of the existing policies which are doing so much damage to their constituents, or a movement away from those policies which will be insufficient to meet the needs of the country, one or the other.

We are members of the opposition. We are always being turned to for advice by the government. We have given them advice but the advice is never taken. It lies in the hands of the Liberal members of this House to move the government away from its damaging fiscal policies; and they will not do it in caucus. I tell you, my dear friends, through you, Mr. Speaker, that you will not do it in caucus.

It is time that backbenchers of the Liberal Party realize the important position which they hold and rise up publicly, openly, in this debate or otherwise, and at whatever opportunity there is, to drive home the point in the British parliamentary system to which the government House leader so often refers when it is convenient to him to do so.

Mr. Pinard: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I see my hon. colleague is making his usual Friday afternoon speech and is throwing dirt at the government and the backbenchers. I want to assure him that there is full solidarity in this party and that there is no way the Liberals will support any Tory government or their policy.

Since he has been referring to me and to the British parliamentary tradition, I want to take this opportunity, Mr. Speaker, through you, to say that I have just made public my intent to strike a special committee to deal with parliamentary reform at the beginning of next week. I hope that he will make his views clear there and that he will not stick to the paper he tabled some one or two years ago, because it was less than acceptable.