

Government Orders

it, this is not the time to do it on the backs of 32 tax increases in six years. Now you are going to hit the consumer with this. You are going to hit essentially the middle and lower income class because their expense on consumable products is much higher than those in the higher income bracket”.

There are some aspects of this I want to highlight. I remember in 1984 Prime Minister Mulroney saying that social programs in Canada are a sacred trust. In the last three years we have been gnawing away at these social programs.

The government introduced Bill C-69, which cut the transfer payments, the equalization payments and reduced the CAP. Now this bill extends it to 1995. We have increased unemployment insurance payments. We have reduced the benefits associated with unemployment insurance. The insurance inputs from employers and employees have increased by more than 50 per cent in two years.

When you buy something in my province of Newfoundland right now, you automatically add 20 per cent. People cannot even afford to buy what it is they are buying. On top of that they have to add 20 per cent. On top of this, because of the reduction in transfer payments, education and medical care are being reduced. These are programs that Canadians have taken for granted. This was a national heritage. In the United States and other countries people look at you as a Canadian and say: “Boy, do you ever live in a great country”. If you come from the province of Newfoundland, I think it is even better. They say: “Are you ever lucky to come from Newfoundland, that delightful part of Canada”.

As Newfoundlanders and as Canadians we were always very proud to tell our foreign friends: “Yes, we have a pretty good system. We have a caring country where the richer provinces look after the poorer provinces a little bit”.

An hon. member: More than a little bit.

Mr. Mifflin: Okay, more than a little bit maybe.

The point is that the richer provinces look after the poorer provinces. There is no other euphemism for it. I do not mind saying that I come from a poorer province. I am very proud of the fact that I come from that province. The poor aspect of it I do not think changes the degree of citizenry or the honour involved in being a citizen of this country.

Without getting too side-tracked on this, one of the universal advantages of being a Canadian was that there was a belief in Canada that your country looked after you. If you did not have a job, you got unemployment insurance. If you were sick, you did not have to worry about having a big fat wallet or a big credit in your Visa account to go to a doctor. If you had hard times and somehow lost your job or got laid off, there was a welfare system to look after you. It was a pretty good system. I hate to say as the thread of the speech I am giving here now that that is all changing.

The word I am getting from my constituents is: “We know times are pretty tough. We are not sure what you can do to change it, but for heaven’s sake hang on to what we have now. Hang on to the lifelines”. People no longer expect that they are going to get the safety nets they had before. The record in the last couple of years does not speak well for that.

They are afraid they are going to lose unemployment insurance totally. They are afraid they are going to lose medicare. They are afraid that the welfare payments are not going to be enough. They are scared and I do not want to add to that.

The government is saying: “The debt is too high. Therefore we are going to have to take money away from the provinces”. What it is really saying is: “We are going to take money away from middle and low income Canadians”. Many of them are sitting in this House in the galleries. There are the staff. I do not think that is fair and I do not think it is right.

I was on business in the United States last week and had the happy occasion to be in the company of my colleagues from the United States who are senators and congressmen. I can stand and say in this House that I probably met close to 20. The outstanding thing that I remember is that not one of them spoke to me without saying: “Hey, you’re from Canada. Tell me all about your medicare system”.

They are worried in the United States. They have 37 million people who have absolutely no insurance whatsoever. What happens is that people get aches and pains and they do not go to doctors because they cannot afford to go. So the aches and pains get worse. By the time they have to go, it is either too late or the bill is astronomical.

The cost for the average person for medical care in the United States is around \$3,500. They spend \$800 billion on medical care. If you look at that on an average per capita basis, my friends in the medical profession tell me it is astronomical. Those 37 million people are worried.