

Unemployment Insurance Act

themselves as employees. This is how workers perceive the deductions made from their cheques.

Bill C-21 changes all of that. The Government is in reality telling Canadians that the responsibility for the unemployed rests with the unemployed, and that the money that working people had put aside for that time when they might be unemployed is not necessarily available to them anymore.

• (1750)

In the process it is telling food banks, service agencies and the churches that they had better get ready because they are going to have more work to do in the future, as we turn thousands, perhaps 300,000 people off the unemployment rolls, not to work, Mr. Speaker, because in a city like my own, we have 12 per cent unemployment. They would be just turned off the rolls and left to presumably collect welfare or do as best they can. We are asking those service and welfare agencies to pick up the slack even more than they have before.

The Government uses two main reasons for forcing these changes on Canadian workers and their families. The first well worn reason is deficit reduction. We did not hear very much about cuts to Government spending during the federal election. The Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) and the rest of the Conservative candidates focused on the deficit reduction only after the votes had been counted and they were back in Ottawa.

In fact, Tory promises during that election campaign totalled billions of dollars. I cannot help but think that a responsible Government would have been up-front with Canadians during that process. I cannot help but think that it would have made its intentions about the deficit known at that time.

One also is to wonder why, even if it was legitimately concerned about over-all government spending, why it chose to pull out of the unemployment insurance program in the way it has, when other initiatives could have been taken, and when it would not have been necessary to attack one of the most vulnerable groups in our society.

After all, of the \$13 billion budget last year that the federal Government utilized, only about \$2.9 billion of

that was in the unemployment insurance fund, the rest being covered by employee and employer contributions.

Some other initiatives could have been taken. Just let me mention one. If the Government, instead of attacking the UI fund to the tune of \$2.9 billion in Bill C-21 had suggested collecting interest even at a reasonable rate of 10 per cent on corporate deferred taxes, that would have raised \$3.6 billion, much more than it has taken off the backs of the unemployed. That is just one example of something which could have been done without attacking the most vulnerable group in our society.

Instead, though, the Government chose to attack the unemployed, perhaps because the unemployed lacked the resources to fight back. I would remind Members opposite that during the attempt to deindex seniors' pensions, another group which perhaps the Government might have thought was not going to fight back, that group fought back most effectively and changed the Government's mind. I want to say that the New Democratic Party will be involved in this fight to change the Government's mind on unemployment insurance, just as it was involved in the fight on the part of the seniors just a short while ago.

Second, the Government is telling us that it wants to prepare Canadian workers for the next century. In fact, the Government's policy statement suggests and I quote: "This effort is designed to ensure that the Canadian labour force of the 1990s will be highly skilled and capable of adapting to an evolving work environment brought on by technological and demographic change."

This gives the impression that what the Government is trying to do is present a far-reaching, forward looking and innovative approach to a skills development problem. However, a closer look reveals something quite different. The Government has slashed the number of weeks for which claimants can receive unemployment insurance. It has made it harder to get unemployment insurance in the first place. It has dropped its commitment to funding unemployment insurance for necessary programs like maternity, sickness and regionally extended benefits.

Only a Conservative Government would have the nerve to suggest that those kind of changes better prepare Canadian workers for the future. It just makes it more unpleasant to be on unemployment. What the Government should have been looking at were ways to