

*Government Orders*

● (1725)

Before concluding, I would like to quote Lise Bissonnette of *Le Devoir*, who wrote these lines in the issue of Tuesday, February 1, 1994:

—the operation also serves as a disguise to a final assault by the federal government, which has been trying since the middle of the century to appropriate provincial fields of jurisdiction enshrined in the Constitution, namely social programs, education, and now labour relations.

It is possible to modify some programs without adversely affecting the have-nots. It is possible to prosper in a regional environment, as is demonstrated by Cascades. But for that to happen, the government must act responsibly. In the past three weeks, I have been receiving phone calls from poor people in my riding. Their first question is invariably: Will the government make cuts in the social programs? I would appreciate it if, one day, the government opposite would tell us precisely and honestly what it will do and where it will make those cuts. Canadians need to be reassured. We must not wait until the poor come and voice their discontentment here, in front of Parliament. We must not wait until then. I will tell you one thing: if it comes to that, I will side with the poor.

[English]

**Mr. Andy Mitchell (Parry Sound—Muskoka):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the member's speech. I congratulate him on it, but I have a couple of questions and a couple of concerns.

I am not absolutely certain but I think I heard him indicate that he was relegating his riding to surviving simply on social assistance, that was to be the mainstay of his riding's economy. I cannot see that as a viable long term solution for his riding.

My riding suffers from high unemployment as well. I come from a rural area with a number of communities. Although we see the importance of social programs to help us through difficult times, we see economic development and the pursuit of rebuilding the economy and creating new jobs as being the long term solution, not simply social programs.

My second observation is that there seemed to be a great amount of concern among the needy of his riding, as he described them, as to from what level of government the assistance comes. It has been my experience when dealing with individuals who are in need of government assistance that their primary concern is that they receive the assistance. They do not much care about a battle between different levels of government getting in the way of the assistance getting to them.

I thought the member might like to comment on those two points.

[Translation]

**Mr. Landry:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer the hon. member opposite. In the case of social programs, I think we must bring in a reform when the economy is going strong and not when it is down. Let me also add that in the case of the unemployment insurance reform, that is Bill C-113, the government penalized 99 per cent of the population simply to catch the one per cent of abusers. In a family such as Canada, of which Quebec is a full member, you must not resort to such measures and hurt the vast majority just to get at a very small number of individuals. You make reforms when the economy is strong, not when it is in difficulty. The recession which we have been going through since the early nineties is a good illustration of my point.

● (1730)

**Mrs. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval-Centre):** Mr. Speaker, western society, that some see as an advanced society, maintains certain values on which is based the principle of equality among individuals. These values can be summed up as the right to health, education, work and personal respect.

These values have long been recognized as essential by Quebec society and by Canadian society. People here have agreed to assume their responsibilities by providing everyone with health, social and educational services whose quality we can only be proud of.

In his motion to the House earlier this week, the Minister of Human Resources Development considers broad consultations to modernize and restructure Canada's social security system, "with particular reference to the needs of families with children, youth and working age adults".

In his statement, the minister assures the Canadian population that, far from wanting to make our social security system less efficient, he wants to improve it. The minister could not be more explicit. We must ensure, he said, that the system continues to offer basic security to all those in need.

What worries me is that there are more and more people in need in this country. Where should we draw the line? Can we draw a line without endangering the principles of universality and accessibility?

If I may, I would like to remind the House that one out of five Quebecers lives below the poverty line; it is easier to identify the groups that are not affected than those who are.

In Canada, one child out of six is poor. If the children are poor, it means that their families are poor. They are not able to offer the living conditions essential to the development of children. It