

Government Orders

Prior to 1990 the unemployment insurance fund worked so that in good times when unemployment was low there was a surplus in the unemployment insurance fund. That is why there was a \$3 billion surplus in 1989-1990. There was a surplus in the fund. When things became bad, as they are now and have been for the last two years, the fund would use up that surplus and go into a deficit. However, in the long run the fund remained rather stable. There was a surplus in good times and a deficit in poor times. In the long run the contributions to the fund, with the government contribution, kept it at a reasonable level.

Now the government says the fund is in a terrible deficit so it is going to cut benefits, cut people off and so on. The reason the fund is in difficulty is that the government hijacked the fund in 1990 and decided to use a great percentage of it for training.

We in the opposition were all for training, but we agreed that training, like education, should be paid for by the entire taxpaying population of the country and not just by workers who contribute to a fund. They alone should not pay for training programs.

We objected to Bill C-21 at the time. We still object to the principle on which it was based.

Bill C-113 does not correct the problems. There are some improvements in Bill C-113 but it does not correct them. The government is shifting a further burden to the provinces and the municipalities with respect to welfare and social assistance.

People who will not get unemployment insurance as a result of this bill will have to live. We are not a country that leaves people dying on the streets from starvation. They will be picked up by the provincial welfare system, and in Ontario and Nova Scotia by the municipal welfare systems. Their deficits for these matters are growing by great percentages each year because of the shifting of burden to them.

When I raised this the other day in the opposition day debate a government member got up, took issue with me and said that what I said was not true. The member said that the government is giving increased sums of money to the provinces and municipalities. It is probably correct that in dollar terms the amounts the government is

giving in 1992-93 are greater than it gave in 1990-91. However, in percentage terms it has cut back on what it should be giving and it is leaving a greater percentage of the burden with the provinces and municipalities. They have a much greater burden than they have had to deal with in the past.

We are in a very grave situation. Over 1 million Canadians have been unemployed for more than a year now. One would think that the principal thrust of the government's legislation and policies would be to put these people to work. My colleague from Toronto spoke of the very sad situation with respect to young Canadians coming out of universities and colleges with degrees and not being able to find work or working for minimum wages in fast food outlets and so on. One would think that its highest priority would be to create jobs and work for Canadians.

However, what is it doing? It is cutting unemployment insurance benefits from 60 to 57 per cent during this period of high unemployment. It is making it more difficult for those who leave jobs for just cause, and I say for just cause, harassment or whatever, because even though it says in the law that people get unemployment insurance benefits if they have just cause it leaves them with the great difficulty of proving it over a long period of time, which is a difficult and serious burden. That is what the government is doing when it should be doing more positive things to put Canadians back to work.

The jobs that are available to Canadians more and more are low-paying, non-union jobs without benefits. They are service jobs that do not compare at all with the industrial jobs that many Canadians had a few years ago.

Unemployment insurance was introduced in 1941 following the Great Depression of the 1930s. In the 1930s there was no unemployment insurance and very little social assistance. The thousands and thousands of people who were laid off had to go to soup kitchens and bread lines and had to use up their savings. Many people lost their homes and sold their furniture because there was no unemployment insurance. Canadians in all provinces said: "We do not want to see that again" so they agreed to an amendment that gave responsibility for unemployment insurance to the federal government and we started the unemployment insurance program.