

*Government Orders*

Mr. Speaker, many people have criticized Bill C-32 and its predecessor, Bill C-69. I will read a few passages from what the experts had to say.

[English]

Lise Corbeil Vincent of the National Anti-Poverty Organization said, according to this article in *The Ottawa Citizen*, and I quote: "This is a disaster for people in Canada".

This program, the one about which we are talking that will be affected, is designed to help those 1.9 million Canadians who are on welfare, and those 1.9 million Canadians on welfare have very little defence. They have very few ways of getting their voices heard. Many times they are the same people who are regrettably functionally illiterate or do not avail themselves, or cannot avail themselves, of the tools to air their grievances.

I want to read a few more quotes. Here is another one: "The poor will become more and more defenceless than ever as the already meagre levels of government support are cut further". Again that was Lise Corbeil Vincent.

Finally Viola Robertson of the Native Council of Canada said: "Many native Canadians already living in Third World conditions will only suffer more as cost-cutting continues to be more important than human lives".

That is the sad reality.

In the riding I represent, Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, we have very high unemployment. Over the last years, as a result of the recession, caused largely by economic policies of this government, and as a result of some of the legislation that has been passed in the House before, namely the changes in the unemployment insurance provisions, the welfare rolls have increased substantially.

[Translation]

And while the unemployment rate is rising in my riding, Mr. Speaker, the federal government announces it will cut transfer payments to the provinces. The province will then cut or at least not increase, transfers to municipalities. Now the municipalities, which happen to be the level of government closest to the taxpayer have to pay the people on their welfare rolls but cannot get the money from the other levels of government.

That is what is happening in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Stormont—Dundas, and other rural ridings in Ontario.

[English]

There is a misconception out there that in Ontario, it being a wealthier province than others, everyone is well off. There are still some people I guess in other regions of the country who would probably define a poor Ontarian as someone who washes his own Cadillac, or something like that. Well, the reality of course is very different.

The area I represent, and I am thinking here of Prescott County particularly, has unemployment of about 15 per cent, very high welfare, and people who are living in conditions that are certainly not what we would wish for them.

[Translation]

Mr. Speaker, there is still time for the government to do something. I ask them to withdraw this bill, this budgetary measure that is so unfair to the neediest in this country. If they stopped to think, they would realize that these cuts which are now being imposed on the so-called wealthier provinces are not really affecting the provinces, the provincial governments or the ministers personally, but the people on welfare in these provinces.

Those are the people we are concerned about, Mr. Speaker. We as parliamentarians are here to defend those who are least able to defend themselves.

[English]

That is why I ask our colleagues across the way to think very seriously about this bill. They have had an opportunity to pause and reflect after the issue went to the Supreme Court of Canada on Bill C-69. The Supreme Court did indicate, at least to a degree, that the government had the legal authority to enact such legislation, and I say to a degree, because on one aspect the decision was not all that clear. But, needless to say, even if it has the legal right, it certainly does not have what I consider to be the moral right to cut back on benefits to the poorest of Canadians.

When we are talking about transfers to the provinces in the Canada Assistance Plan, that is exactly what we are referring to; we are talking about money for education and money for welfare. In the area of welfare I have explained the effects, and in the area of education it is the same, Mr. Speaker. Because if we do not invest to train our population, we will find more and more of them in poverty. The poor will get poorer and the rich will get richer, and that is not good for us as a society. It is bad