

Government Orders

The one thing that I heard over and over again during the last six weeks in my riding in downtown Toronto is that people who are on welfare and on unemployment insurance are feeling guilty about taking that assistance. A lot of people, for the first time in their lives, have had to go on unemployment insurance and welfare in the city of Toronto. Our welfare rolls have doubled in the last year and a half. We have got people saying: "Gosh, I'd much rather be doing something in the community. Give me something to do".

There has always been a slur or an aspersion cast upon people who in the past have taken unemployment insurance and welfare. It is as though most people who are on welfare want to be on welfare. That is not the case. We have to figure out ways to get the people who are on welfare and unemployment insurance back into that work force.

We cannot just stand here and criticize the government. There are ways. I would like to start off by saying that there are 900,000 entrepreneurs in this country. I remember in 1981 when the member for then Winnipeg—Fort Garry, the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, who was the minister of employment at that time when there was also a very deep recession in this country, came up with the NEED program in which for six months the Government of Canada guaranteed 50 per cent of a person's wages. For the next three months it guaranteed 25 per cent of it. When it analysed that program after its completion, it was ranked to be one of the most successful programs in terms of getting people back to work quickly.

That is the kind of initiative that we need in this Parliament of Canada today. Just because it happened to come from a Liberal minister of employment, the government should not feel shy in taking that idea, dusting it off and using it again.

Mr. Walker: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I understand this is a piece of government legislation which normally requires a minister to be here in the House.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Fee): I have been advised that it is the custom and tradition of the House that we not mention the absence of any member. We will just resume debate, please.

Mr. Mills: I think my colleague, our critic responsible for social development for the Liberal Party, is naturally concerned that on a bill like this we have a bit more support from the government side. We are not just trying to be critical of its policy, we are trying to put some ideas forward that will allow us to put Canadians back to work.

I want to repeat that the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre had a program in 1981. It was called the NEED program. In about 90 days we put about 300,000 Canadians back to work. We used the 900,000 businesses in this country to become active and take a chance on the human capital not employed because of the deep world recession. Why can we not do the same today? Why can we not find ways to enhance our municipal infrastructure which needs rebuilding, which needs repair?

What are we waiting for? These are things that would not cost the treasury that much because they are jointly shared programs. The province puts in one-third, municipalities put in one-third, the national government puts in one-third. By the time we figure what we are already paying, that \$30 billion on unemployment insurance, plus welfare, if we turn that into a productive labour force, that would get this economy kick started again.

These are the kinds of things that Canadians want to hear us talking about in this Parliament of Canada. They want to hear us debating ways in which we can get people back to work. When people are back to work, there is less stress on the health care system, less stress on family life, and less stress on all the other social services, which ultimately would mean that this cap on the Canada Assistance Plan for those most in need would not be required. We would not need to be debating this legislation in the Parliament of Canada today.

Once again the government is using this almost tunnel vision approach to facing the deficit and debt of the nation. It is an incredible thing. It has almost brainwashed Canadians into thinking that deficit and debt are the priority one issues in this country.

• (1340)

It has almost brainwashed Canadians into thinking that for the last seven years this government has lived within its means. This government has not lived within its means from the very first day it came into power. It came into power with a \$180 billion deficit and half of