

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): At one o'clock when the House adjourned, I was pointing out that for me, particularly as a member of Parliament from British Columbia, it is a pleasure to be able to participate in this very important debate on the government's proposed cutbacks on basic and fundamental financial support to the people of British Columbia.

Late last year, the Vancouver city caucus of elected representatives met in the city of Vancouver. The Vancouver city caucus is a group of elected representatives, chaired by the mayor of Vancouver, Gordon Campbell, and is made up of members of city council, the school board, provincial elected representatives and all five of the federal members of Parliament from the city of Vancouver.

At that city caucus meeting, we heard from speaker after speaker that one of the most critical issues facing the city of Vancouver and the people of British Columbia was the cutback by this Conservative government on the commitments it had made under the Canada Assistance Plan.

We know that the British Columbia Court of Appeal ruled that this particular attempt to betray a commitment that had been made to the people of British Columbia was illegal. Unfortunately, that decision was reversed by the Supreme Court of Canada.

• (1520)

One of the major reasons that we in the New Democratic Party so strongly support a social charter, a charter that sets out the fundamental values that shape this country in economic, social and cultural terms, is that hopefully such a charter and the existence of such a charter would prevent this kind of betrayal from taking place.

We are seeing the people of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario particularly the victims of Bill C-32, being punished for the bankrupt economic policies of the Conservative government.

We have seen a series of these policies, whether it be the trade deal or other. I remember very well during the election of 1988 when the Conservative Prime Minister travelled across the land saying: "There are going to be hundreds of thousands of new jobs created by the trade deal". Members of this House will remember that.

Instead of creating new jobs in this country the trade deal resulted in the destruction of hundreds of thousands of jobs right across this land. As well, we have seen the erosion in social services and the attacks under way on marketing boards in this country. As a result of the trade deal there is now the suggestion that Canada

Government Orders

should go even further, that we should enter into a trade deal with the United States and Mexico.

That would be the end of any kind of manufacturing sector in this country. The cheap labour in the Maquiladora zone in Mexico obviously would be a magnet which would result in the effective shutting down of Canadian industry.

What we see in Bill C-32 is part of a trend by this Conservative government to off-load its responsibilities as a national government on to provincial governments. We have seen the impact of that in the province of Ontario in which the New Democratic government of Ontario has very courageously said that it will not be the poorest and the most vulnerable to pay the price of this government's economic policies.

We are seeing it in British Columbia where since 1982 some \$1.1 billion has been off-loaded as a result of the policies, both of the Conservative government and of the previous Liberal federal government. This amounts to some 67 per cent of the estimated 1991-92 budget deficit of \$1.7 billion. It is the victims of this government's economic policies who are being asked to pay the price.

We know that as unemployment insurance benefits run out, people turn in despair to welfare. That is the only thing they have left. I have met with many of the employees of Versatile Pacific Shipyards in my constituency, men who have worked there for 25, 30 or 35 years and are proud of the work they do. Yet, as a result of this government's economic policies, Versatile Pacific has thrown these people out of work. Their unemployment insurance has expired and now they are on the welfare rolls. This government's policies mean that there are going to be less and less funds available to help those who are most desperate and who are most in need. Who are they? They are children. The people most affected by these policies, by this cap on the CAP, are children. We know that children are the greatest recipients of social assistance.