

Government Orders

What it has meant is that people no longer qualify. If they do, their benefits run out more quickly. All of a sudden what happens? They have to rely on their municipality for welfare and when the federal government has cutbacks on the transfers to every single province in this country, it means that those provincial governments do not have the money to do anything. The municipalities almost go belly-up.

It is a much broader problem than it first appeared to be. Most of it can go back to the misguided policies of this Conservative government.

Mr. Iain Angus (Thunder Bay—Atikokan): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in third reading debate today of Bill C-32.

In doing so, I want to try and outline a couple of things, one of which is an example on how we approach things differently than the government of the day or the official opposition when it was government in terms of our role in society, the role of government, the role of Parliament and the role in the relation between the federal, provincial and municipal governments.

This bill deals with a restriction on the amount of tax dollars shared with different parts of this country. The three provinces being restricted in that cash flow are B.C., Alberta and Ontario, supposedly because they are the have provinces.

I come from a community that has seen over a thousand mill jobs lost in the last year; a community that has a shaky future as it relates to the grain handling and transportation industry; an infrastructure that is deteriorating.

It is an infrastructure that is totally incomplete because we are still flushing our sewage almost virtually untouched into Lake Superior. We have a government that says: "Ontario, you have to do more on your own. The taxpayers of Ontario have to do more on their own". Ultimately it comes down to that, whether it is through increases in provincial taxes or whether it is through increases in property taxes, which are even more regressive than taxes like the GST.

I have had the occasion over the last three to four weeks, as part of the break from the House, to talk to a large cross-section of my constituency. Some was formal. I held a series of eight working sessions on the economy throughout the riding over two weeks. I also held a

constituent assembly which attracted people not just from my riding, but from the neighbouring parts of the Thunder Bay—Nipigon riding in the city of Thunder Bay. Out of those meetings came a real understanding for me of the thinking of the people who were there.

In part, it has been paralleled by the conferences that I think have gone extremely well, held in different parts of Canada, to deal with the Constitution. They all relate to this particular bill. They relate to government powers, they relate to government spending, they relate to the trust that is placed in all of us in this House by the people who voted for us and who elected us. It also speaks to the kinds of things that we are hearing across Canada about the need for some protection from the actions of governments.

We saw this past weekend, at a conference that was designed to deal with the question of the economic union, an explicit request that some of those things that we value as Canadians, some of those things that make us different from our neighbour to the south, receive some kind of protection in the Constitution. People call it a social charter.

My leader, the member for Yukon, made a proposal, not last month but last year and the year before about the need to place a social charter in the Constitution. The premier of Ontario, Bob Rae, a former member of this House, formally proposed it as the representative of the province of Ontario. We saw at the conference strong support for it. Based on the constituent assembly that I held in Thunder Bay a week and a half ago, there is strong support there as well.

We raised the question on collective rights and basically asked a group of men and women who represented a fairly good cross-section politically, economically and what have you, if our Constitution should include more guarantees of collective rights and, if so, what collective rights should be included. Eighty-two per cent of those casting ballots said yes and then when we gave them a list to choose from and places to add on, they voted as follows: 78 per cent for a minimum standard of living; 91 per cent for decent health care; 81 per cent for an education and a job; 91 per cent for clean air and clean water; 63 per cent for collective bargaining; 84 per cent for integration of people with disabilities; 78 per cent for participation in the formation of economic and social goals.