

Government Orders

government is simply shifting the burden from the national government to the individual provincial governments which are in no way equivalent to a federal government, do not have the resources, and the poorer the province, obviously the poorer the benefits the people are going to get.

The government has also devastated the benefits of fishermen and of other seasonal workers like lumbermen. There is no way that this can be called an equitable program because it is not based on equity. You have to understand, Mr. Speaker, that in a riding like mine, for instance, the main industries are seasonal. This is why we have an unemployment rate which is around 13 per cent officially. In reality, the unemployment rate is around 20 to 30 per cent in many communities, and this pertains all year round, but it goes as high as 40 and 50 per cent in the wintertime.

This is where the legislation does not make any sense. These people where real unemployment is so high will have to work longer periods to receive UI benefits. Where are they going to go to get that work? While the government thinks it is saving by gutting social programs, what it is actually doing is increasing costs of medical care, of lost production, of depression of the national spirit, and dissolving the will of people to fulfil their ambitions, to improve their lot, to make progress, and to contribute to the growth of the nation.

This country is rich in resources, both natural and human. This government has a great opportunity to develop these resources. Instead it is looking for ways and means to let others develop our country and its resources at the expense of our most precious resource, our people.

It is not too late for the government to take a different tack, to reorient itself to become a government of the people for the people and by the people. There is still time. There is still an opportunity to have this country achieve its full potential. Let us pursue that course rather than finding ways to turn back the hands of time to a bygone and discredited era of Toryism. We must vote against this very reactionary Tory bill.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): On questions or comments, the Hon. Member for Northumberland.

Mrs. Stewart: Mr. Speaker, I was very interested in the comments of my colleague and the effects that this proposed bill that we are voting on today is going to have on his region of the country. I think everybody on this side of the House is extremely sympathetic to that. However, in fact it does affect every area of the country including my riding of Northumberland. I have had presentations made to me by many people and groups in the area.

I wanted to ask the member what his experience has been, because one of the groups that is particularly concerned in my riding is the municipal officials group. It is suggested, through statistics, that it is 2 per cent of the population that perhaps abuses the unemployment insurance system as it now exists.

Municipal officials in my riding are very concerned that the cuts proposed are going to raise the number of welfare cases in their municipalities by 50 per cent. For example, in Trenton, unemployment insurance now covers an average of 1,696 persons per year. That municipality feels it cannot support a 50 per cent rise in its welfare programs to pick up the slack from the unemployment cases.

Their other concern is that of the bulk of the recipients of unemployment insurance claims. Sixty-four per cent are in the 25 to 44 year age group, which is not the age group abusing the system. They are family people. They are people who very often live on wages below \$25,000 a year. The disparity between men and women who will be affected in our area is as follows: 64 per cent are women versus 36 per cent male. I am wondering if the hon. member is hearing from municipal officials in his area on concerns about having to pick up the social safety net that the government is dumping on them through this bill.

• (1620)

Mr. Dionne: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for the question. In the riding I represent we do not have any large cities. Large cities are generators of economic activity. The best we can do is two towns and a number of incorporated villages, and the rest of the riding is unincorporated area.

Those people who are going to be savaged by this government's attempt to rape the unemployment insurance scheme will find themselves in very dire straits when this bill is passed. The benefits are not going to be