

Government Orders

It is hypocritical in that it says we need to leave more money in the hands of consumers. Is that what it is doing when it cuts unemployment insurance, when it says that when people have lost their job after 20, 25 or 30 years of dedicated service to an employer they are going to be able to collect barely half their salary, provided it is under \$33,000?

Is that how people are going to manage to send and keep their children in school, to send them on to university, to develop the education and commitment to learning that this country needs in the future? I do not think so. Do we leave money in the pockets of consumers so that they can stimulate the economy when we freeze wages for the largest employer in the country?

• (1340)

The federal government itself says that half a million and more public sector employees are going to have no more income next year when they have already been through one year of zero increase and then they are going to have a third year on top of that. Does that stimulate consumer spending? I do not think so.

Does it stimulate consumer spending when the government says on one hand that it is going to spend millions of dollars to create jobs and on the other that it is going to create unemployment within its own work force? Does it stimulate or save money by forcing people not to collect unemployment insurance but instead to collect welfare from the local community where other unemployed people like them are struggling to keep a roof over their head and pay their property taxes? Does that help stimulate consumer spending? I do not think so.

This economic statement tackles the lowest paid or the totally unpaid, the most vulnerable in our society and in each of our communities. It has been the pattern of this government to not do its job for those who most need leadership from their government to end the misery and create jobs.

We have young people dropping out of school to support their families. Does that help build a future for this country? I think not. We have a government boasting about improvements. It says: "Trade is up, jobs are up".

However, that is not the reality that Canadians are seeing.

When it has let the situation get so bad that it cannot get any worse I suppose it seizes on one-tenth of one per cent improvement to claim improvement. If there is any improvement in any indicator it is only because under this government the situation has got so bad that it is no longer tolerable for Canadians, and this government is no longer tolerable for Canadians.

Mrs. Dorothy Dobbie (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I would like the hon. member to tell me how much the interest payments are on the national debt and how much they were when her government left office.

She talks about the debt growing and the difficulties that the government today has in terms of options. She may want to outline for the members of this House and the public what contribution her government made in its previous incarnation as the party in power.

It left a huge debt, and the increase in the debt is entirely due to interest payments. When that government left office the gap between income tax and program spending was absolutely incredible, insupportable. It mortgaged the futures of not only our children but our grandchildren. Those members continue to talk about program spending that would further bankrupt this country, and not just our grandchildren but their grandchildren as well.

Perhaps she would like to explain how her party would come up with all these programs, with all of this spending, with all of these quick fixes without increasing the debt the way it did in the 1970s.

Mrs. Catterall: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to reply to that question with a question to the hon. member.

I ask her how her government has turned the debt of this country from less than \$170 billion to close to \$500 billion. I ask her how her government has managed to introduce 37 different tax increases, increasing the burden on the poor and making the middle class close to poor, but has still not managed to pay off some of that debt and therefore reduce the interest payments on that debt.