

Government Orders

tion and the needs and practices of other levels of government.

We as a party believe that the issue of visibility is also important, that tax reform should be designed to help Canadians understand exactly how much tax they are paying and to which level of government they are paying it.

Also as Liberals, being the progressive people that we are, we believe that tax reform should be revenue neutral. Tax reform should be undertaken for the goal of improving the tax system, not of raising raise taxes.

When the people who reside in the federal riding of North York received my special GST report they responded quite favourably. They also participated in signing petitions which were eventually forwarded to the House. They felt betrayed by the Conservative government, a government that made many election promises but is certainly not following through with action. The many signatures on petitions from residents of York North were a manifestation of frustrations that they felt about this government.

• (1640)

They began to realize that as the Conservative agenda unfolds they are more and more left out of the system. They began looking, for example, at the erosion of the social safety net of our country. They looked at the clawback of seniors' old age pension and family allowances. They looked at the withdrawal of government from unemployment insurance. They looked at the cuts in Established Programs Financing that are putting great financial strain on our provinces.

Essentially what I am very concerned about in this particular issue is that it touches the very essence of what government should be doing. Government should be taking care of the people. Nothing is more important than the issues of health care and education. Anything that we do to hurt post-secondary education will block the major artery to Canada's future.

In many of the meetings I have when I return to my riding to listen to the concerns of the constituents of York North on Fridays or Saturdays, they tell me that they are also concerned about what this government is doing in relation to dismantling the national infrastructures of this nation. We have heard a lot about VIA Rail

in this House. The residents are very much concerned about not only the symbolism, but the importance in economic terms of linking east and west together.

Although the closure of military bases might not affect the people of North York personally, it does affect the very essence of being Canadian. They are concerned about the refusal of this government to aid municipalities on the issue of infrastructure decay. They are concerned about the CBC and post office cuts. I could go on and on.

Also the people of York North are telling me—and I am sure that in the next election they will tell this government—that they are concerned about the creation of two Canadas: the increasing gap between the rich and the poor. I speak not only about individuals but also about the regions of this nation.

Poverty is increasing in Canada, especially among women and children. To make matters worse, the tax system of this nation affects low income wage earners.

We are also beginning to realize, as we see the Conservative government agenda unfold, that this government has a very narrow, almost tunnel vision of what the future of the nation should be. Nothing symbolizes that more than the cuts to areas such as research and development, EPF and VIA Rail. These examples that are given to us by the government tell me that indeed this nation is going through some serious problems.

Today's debate is not merely a debate about borrowing, it is a debate about the future direction of the nation. Do we accept the concept that we live solely in a market-driven economy where profits come first and people last, or should we be looking at other ways to make sure that within the economic agenda the government includes a humane and compassionate dimension to its policies?

I believe I reflect the feelings of the people whom I represent in the riding of York North when I say that unless this government is interested in self-destruction it should seriously re-examine the direction that it is taking and bring about the type of progressive changes that this nation deeply desires.

Mr. Rey Pagtakhan (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I certainly commend my colleague from North York for his concluding remarks that the government must re-examine its policies to provide for the future of our