

Government Orders

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): Since today is the last allotted day in the supply period ending December 10, 1992, the House will proceed, as usual, to consideration and passage of a supply bill.

Considering our recent practice, is it agreed to have the bill distributed now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Ms. Copps: Mr. Speaker, since many members wish to speak to this motion, we in our caucus have decided to share our speaking time. In other words, we will each take 10 minutes.

[*English*]

Canada has the highest unemployment rate in the western world; higher than Britain, France, Italy, Germany, Japan and the United States.

An hon. member: Shame.

Ms. Copps: Yet once again last week we heard the government say that it has the fundamentals right, that it will stay the course, that it is doing a good job.

In the United States, the unemployment rate is 7.2 per cent and President-elect Clinton has called it a national disgrace. He has called for a massive program to put people back to work. In Canada, the unemployment rate is 11.8 per cent and this government has cut benefits for the jobless.

An hon. member: Shame.

Ms. Copps: Two days after the Minister of Finance tabled an economic statement in which he said one more time that the recession is over, the unemployment rate has once again reached a record high; 1,650,000 in jobless lines. The Minister of Finance calls people who are worried about the unemployed bleeding hearts.

The Minister of Finance says the way to kick-start the economy is to kick people when they are down. The Minister of Finance says the ways to attack unemployment is to attack the unemployed. The Minister of Finance says the way to attack poverty is to attack the poor. There are millions of people in this country who cannot afford to put presents under their Christmas tree this year and who cannot even afford to provide a Christmas dinner for their children. It is not like they cannot afford a Christmas turkey with stuffing and cranberry sauce. They cannot afford a grilled cheese sandwich. They will have to rely upon Christmas baskets

from charitable organizations to feed their kids on December 25.

The minister of employment calls them couch potatoes. It is not like they cannot afford Air Jordan basketball shoes and Nintendo Game Boys for their kids. They cannot afford shoes or any games for their kids. The minister of employment accuses them of wanting to spend their winters in Florida.

Millions of people who are still employed are terrified about whether they will be able to hang on to their jobs. They are worried they will be the next out on the street and the minister of employment calls them rip off artists and bums.

In a desperate effort to appeal to a right-wing constituency in a budget last week that I parallel as almost an instant replay of the Republican convention last summer, the government has chosen to destroy hope for all those who are down on their luck. In a desperate effort to give the Prime Minister another couple of months to make up his mind whether he is going to quit or not, this government, with no constructive agenda, has decided to stick it to the weakest members of our society.

While the Prime Minister will be spending his Christmas at 24 Sussex, millions of other Canadians will be at the Shepherds of Good Hope, the Salvation Army soup kitchen or the local food bank. While the Minister of Justice is in Vancouver planning her leadership bid, thousands of her constituents will be figuring out how to tell their children that Santa Claus is not coming this year. While the Secretary of State for External Affairs is planning her leadership bid, thousands of Torontonians will be lining up to collect welfare. While the Minister of Communications is travelling around Ontario in his bid, 600,000 jobless Ontarians will go to bed realizing that the ministers in this government consider them to be the dregs in society.

In a despicable attempt to try to gain support among people who do have jobs, this government is prepared to sacrifice the one in five Canadians who do not have jobs. This government is hoping to get re-elected by proving that it can beat up on the little guy. The government plans to cut hundreds of thousands of people off unemployment insurance so that it can claim that it has reduced the official unemployment rate. It does not care that it is going to throw thousands and thousands of people on to the welfare lines. It will not help the unemployed. It will recategorize them.