

the poverty level for a family of four. If the government had wanted to do something about this category of worker, they would have done something directly. They would have at least increased their own minimum wage. However, there is not a thing in the program about increasing the federal minimum wage.

● (1630)

There is no suggestion that the provinces, which are part of the package, should increase their minimum wage. Many of the provinces, which in terms of resources are much poorer than the federal government, have even lower wages. The federal government did not do anything about increasing the minimum wage at the federal level. Nor did they suggest to the provinces that was the least they could do for workers under their jurisdiction.

The proposed guideline of \$600 at the bottom level is not mandatory. There is no requirement that all workers will get it. It is only if the workers are lucky. If, for example, they have an employer who is benevolent after the controls in a way that he was not before, and gives the workers the \$600 increase, they will get it. However, there is no reason to believe they will get the \$600 today if a week ago the employer would not have thought of passing it on to them.

Because the minister has put controls on the trade union sector, the effective following up of wage gains in the non-trade union sector that has traditionally taken place simply will not happen now. The organized workers, whether they be in Atlantic Canada, central Canada or the west, have set patterns for the unorganized workers. By indirect effect, they have caused increases to be passed on to them that they otherwise would not have got. This is because of the initiative taken in the collective bargaining sector.

Precisely because the minister has now put effective controls on the bargaining sector to ensure they do not go above 8 or 10 per cent, there is an even greater likelihood that all those men and women outside the trade union movement will have lower increases than would otherwise have been the case. I repeat, they have no one to bargain for them. With the controls being put on the trade union movement, the example-setting precedent in terms of wage demands has been taken away. The government has indirectly done more harm to unorganized workers because they have not made mandatory increases in the minimum wage at either the federal or provincial level which would have been some kind of compensation.

The second point I would like to make is in terms of the guideline for those firms employing 500 people or less. Everywhere east of the province of Quebec I would guess that between 80 and 90 per cent of firms employ fewer than 500 people. The government has given the moral and legal authority to companies in the whole of Atlantic Canada to keep their wages even lower because most of those companies employ 500 or fewer people. Most of those companies do not have trade unions. The working people have no effective representation in arguing for improvements in their working conditions, including wages. This program will give employers in Atlantic Canada a very effective weapon to keep wages down.

The government should be more concerned about the non-unionized worker in Canada. The Minister of Labour (Mr. Munro) is addressing trade union meetings in

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Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, urging compliance with the program. I am not in any way suggesting that they should defy the law. However, instead of his concentrating on urging them to comply with the guidelines, it would make much more sense if he would travel around Ontario and other parts of the country urging the formation of trade unions. He should be doing this in Atlantic Canada and in other places where the trade union movement is not strong or is non-existent. Urging the formation of trade unions would do far more good for the ordinary workers than a thousand speeches to existing trade unions urging compliance with the guidelines.

If the government had been really concerned about the work force, they would have made specific proposals to raise minimum wages at the federal and the provincial levels. They would have ensured that the suggested minimums were at least passed on to those workers at the bottom of the scale. There is no such requirement. The government should do something about promoting the organization of unorganized workers. There is nothing in this program that will positively affect unorganized workers in Canada.

What about pensioners, another group that presumably is included in the minister's description of lower income people? I point out that a single pensioner in Canada receiving the regular pension plus the supplement receives only \$219.96 a month, or just over \$2,400 a year. That is all we give a pensioner in Canada in October, 1975. The poverty level for a single individual in Canada is \$3,372, about \$1,000 more than we give to a single pensioner. Is there anything in this program that is of direct benefit to a pensioner? Is there any suggestion that the rest of us, including individuals and corporations, will have a substantial tax increase in order to make it easier for the pensioner? There is nothing in the program that will alter the circumstances of a pensioner.

It is ironic, with sad overtones, that the maximum pension a person in Canada can get, if he does not have a private pension, is about what the salary increase will be for an MP and, in fact, the increase permitted to all people in all upper income groups—\$2,400. Many of us will get an increase this year which is permitted within the guidelines of this program that is equivalent to the total paid to Canada's pensioners. Something is profoundly wrong when we have that kind of maldistribution of income.

● (1640)

Also, something is obviously wrong when we find the minister justifying his program and saying that the people with the lowest incomes are those who will be the prime beneficiaries. We reject that contention. We rejected it last Tuesday as being unfair, and the minister has said nothing since then which alters that judgment.

Let me deal with one argument I suspect he might make; he did refer to it earlier today. He said that if the government is effective in bringing down the cost of living through his program, then those at the bottom end of the scale would benefit. Of course they would benefit if we reduced the cost of living, but the point is they would not benefit any more than anyone else; in fact, since most of those with higher incomes spend more in dollar terms