

Government Orders

As I walk through my constituency—I am sure it would be consistent no matter what community I visited in Canada, whether it be a major urban centre or a small community—I find people supporting themselves through some entrepreneurial endeavour. I find that their incomes have been reduced in the last four to five years in a significant way. They have also reduced the number of their employees. In the majority of cases it is 20 per cent to 25 per cent.

Their expectations have been lowered. They have made an adjustment in the business community. I visited 800 businesses in Lethbridge in the latter part of 1993 and again in 1994. They saw they were under economic pressure. The only way they could continue their businesses was to have a balanced book in which the revenues would somewhat equal the expenditures. They could not go out and borrow more to maintain their staff levels, their expenditure levels or the standard of living that they and their families were enjoying. They had to make adjustments.

They made those adjustments. They quietly made them. Many of them maintained their businesses. They are in place looking for growth in the economy. Certainly they have placed their confidence in us as members of Parliament to assure and to work toward factors that will bring about that growth.

They have made a significant adjustment, more than the 5 per cent that is being requested in the province of Alberta, more than the 7.5 per cent that is being requested in the province of British Columbia. On that basis we support this first move of the government in terms of freezing not only the levels of income but the increments that usually follow from year to year to the public service.

The second area is the reductions to the Canada assistance plan and the Public Utilities Transfers Act. Again we recognize the need for that. The government must consider the fairness with which it is done. In 1991 a cap was put on the amount of money that was transferred to three of the provinces of Canada. The other seven provinces did not have that cap. Now the cap is being put on all of them. Supposedly there is equity in the distribution of funds so that each Canadian, in no matter which province, is treated fairly in terms of those programs. As members of Parliament we must examine the concept of equalization. I spoke on an earlier bill in this House that brought about the equalization formula. I made the point that if the equalization formula is right and fair and is doing its job, it will mean the equalization of funding across Canada for a variety of programs. If that is correct, every other program that redistributes income or dollars to the provinces or a transfer of dollars to individuals in Canada should be done on an equal basis because we have created equality. I hope when the government implements this program it keeps that principle in mind.

• (1315)

The third area in this bill is with regard to transportation subsidies. We would support these reductions in terms of our economic conditions because we have to make those kinds of decisions. We feel that western Canada in terms of the Western Grain Transportation Act and the maritimes should be involved in the decision-making and the government should consult those respective parties as these programs are delivered and the shared responsibility for them is taken.

The other area in this bill is the borrowing authority that we are giving to the Canada Broadcasting Corporation. We do not support that because we feel this is only another avenue by which funding is going to the CBC in order to pick up its deficit. In the last fiscal year I believe its deficit was between \$40 million and \$60 million.

We do not believe this is the right thing to do and we certainly are going to be speaking about it in subsequent debate. We do not believe that the capital projects the CBC has in mind can be repaid in a period of two to three years as it stated to us in our briefing on this part of the bill. We do not believe that can happen.

We believe that another means is being established by which the CBC is able to secure funds by borrowing. We must recognize that the Government of Canada, this Parliament, in the end result has the responsibility of picking up the deficit. If this plan of the CBC does not work, we are on the hook. It is just another way that public funds are put into the broadcasting system of this nation. We think this authority is opening up a valve that cannot be controlled by this Parliament, even though there is a lid of \$25 million on the amount that can be borrowed.

The last area is the area of unemployment insurance changes. I know that has received a lot of debate in the House, both the pros and cons, the good and the bad. We believe that this program should be put on an insurance basis so that if someone loses his or her job, he or she has income during the interim period between jobs. It should not be an income program as it has been. It has changed from its original objective to an income program in many instances.

I know presumably responsible people who have highly paid jobs for three or four months who after that automatically go on unemployment insurance and take advantage of this government income. It is in every business community that we can think of. It is up to us as legislators to stop that in any way that we can.

In conclusion, and I realize I only have a few seconds left, I will make these two points.

First, we are going to vote against this because of the mixture of principles that are in the bill. Our position is weighted on the side to say nay to the bill.