

Government Orders

on other social and health programs which attempt to deal with our labour market induced poverty.

Why do we not concentrate on stopping that poverty and developing economic policies which ensure that people do not become poor? In this country we have put up with unemployment rates well above those of other developed nations, our competitors, without addressing those real concerns. We need a different approach and a commitment to help those who are suffering in poverty. We need a commitment to social rights.

As we heard in Montreal on the weekend, Canadians believe that we should commit ourselves to the health care programs we all view as so important to the social safety net which we have seen eroded by this government over the last seven or eight years.

We saw that commitment in Montreal and we see it across the country as we go about our business as MPs. We see people who want Canada to recognize that our social programs and our health care programs are critical to our national survival. They are critical because they provide a safety net for people so that when we attempt to deal with the economic problems that we clearly face, those people can do so with some confidence in knowing that they will not be poor and that they will be able to feed their children in the event that they might lose their job.

This government is not listening and that is why it is at record lows in the polls. If it wanted to look at what happens when governments do not listen, it should just look at those provincial governments across this country that have not listened to the complaints and the concerns of those who are most badly treated. Those governments are being defeated and that is what will happen to this government, although not before it creates so much damage. That defeat cannot be soon enough.

Mr. Peter Milliken (Kingston and the Islands): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the speech of the hon. member for Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing. I agree with much of what he said.

I want to ask him to explain to the House why he is able to be so critical, and deservedly so, of this government's disgraceful performance in the field of education and health as evidenced in particular by this bill we are discussing today. Recently the New Democratic Party

government in Ontario, of which I know he is a staunch supporter, reduced the transfers to hospitals and universities in the province to a 1 per cent increase during the current financial year. I think he would agree with me that is perhaps both ill timed and inappropriate, particularly in the case of the universities which, according to his political colleagues in Toronto, have been chronically underfunded for years.

I wonder if he could explain to the House the fact that it seems the government in Toronto behaves exactly as the government in Ottawa does. They are both Tories and there is really no difference in how you vote.

Mr. Axworthy (Saskatoon—Clark's Crossing): Mr. Speaker, I was expecting a question in that vein from my colleagues. Clearly, it is the case that provincial governments across this country, even those in the richest provinces, are squeezed for revenues.

• (1320)

They have looked in the short term to what changes they might make both on the revenue side and on the expenditure side to deal with these concerns.

Part of the problem, of course, arises as a result of accumulated Liberal debt in Ontario while the government in that province voted Liberal. Where spending was profligate to say the least in good times, the Liberal government in that province borrowed, even when it should have been salting away money for the tough times after it was defeated.

Part of the problem revolves around the creation of the debt by the Liberal government of Premier Peterson. Part of the problem and a very important part of the problem is as a result of cutbacks in transfers to Ontario. Indeed, most of the deficit in the first budget of the New Democratic government in Ontario was as a result of federal cutbacks.

While cutbacks to universities and health care raise concern, at least if they go on in the long term, in the short term it is unfortunate that they needed to have taken place. It is clear that unlike the Liberal and Conservative governments across this country, the New Democratic Government of Ontario, as with the New Democrat governments in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and the Yukon, are committed to bolstering those institutions in the long term rather than continuing to attack them.