

Government Orders

end of it. Those are what we are talking about and that is the kind of thing that is the subject of any claim for priority. That is what ought to be used. That fund ought to be used to pay the wages. It should be used for wages first and if it cannot satisfy wages then that is the way it is. Wages should be first before paying off shareholders who happen to have debentures registered, or banks or lenders that happen to have floating securities on top of specific securities.

Mr. John R. Rodriguez (Nickel Belt): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the speech by the hon. member for Mississauga South. It makes a lot of sense. That was the kind of atmosphere in which we discussed this bill in pre-study.

The member mentioned what the issues were. He mentioned a lot of issues. I want to ask him if he thinks that this is the time, given the state of the economy of the country, that any government should be introducing another tax on small and medium-sized businesses. We are talking about having to raise the unemployment insurance premiums in January so we can balance that account by \$5 billion. Is this the time that we should be imposing another tax on small and medium-sized businesses in this country? Is it not a real fear that it will start at 10 cents but before you know it will be up to \$5 a week per person.

Mr. Blenkarn: Mr. Speaker, I always have difficulty with a tax of any kind. What really sends shock waves up my spine is the specific provision in this act that calls it the imposition of a tax.

I think Canadians are fed up to their teeth with taxes right now. Our economy is certainly not strong in the sense that people feel good about things. The government says to employers: "Well, here is another levy, it is just a small levy, it is only another dime". It is not just another dime. Not only that, but it is a dime from a whole lot of people who are not going to collect or cannot collect or their employees cannot collect. Somewhere along the line government has to avoid that. My friend will remember that the Canadian Chamber of Commerce apparently thinks this wage protection fund is a great idea except it does not want to have any tax. It believes it ought to come out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund. The Canadian Chamber of Commerce,

with Mr. Reid in charge, apparently thinks that out behind this place is a big orchard and any time you need some extra money you go out there and shake the tree again.

Members are starting to understand that there is not an unlimited capacity for business people or workers or anybody else to pay taxes. It is about time that we in this House started realizing that and we started prioritizing our claims against the state. I am suggesting to this House that this particular wage protection fund is not a priority claim against the estate of Canada, the claim should be against the estate of insolvent companies.

Mr. Jim Edwards (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member for Mississauga South is fully aware of the fact that the minister has seen fit to favour 15 of the 21 recommendations of the pre-study and whether he recognizes that this indeed is not a social policy and not a new social right.

The employers under this bill would pay into a fund. This would not be the government's money but the employees' money owed to them by their employers. Does the hon. member recognize that fact?

Finally, does the hon. member not recognize that with the scheme contained in this bill workers would come first, that they would be paid much more expeditiously than under any super priority scheme? Under super priority they might get nothing or might wait for months for any payment to come to them. Under this scheme they would receive their money and receive it expeditiously. Does the hon. member recognize that?

Mr. Blenkarn: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the parliamentary secretary for his question.

Clearly some workers will get their money. The parliamentary secretary ought to realize that only some workers will get their money. Those employees of a small business for which a trustee has not been hired or a receiver has not been employed will get nothing. Yet every small businessman in this country will pay, every hospital board will pay, every municipality will pay, and this federal government will pay. Why will it pay? It will pay a tax to a fund to protect workers or possibly to protect banks.