

Government Orders

of Canada, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia, with not the slightest degree of understanding or sympathy.

The people of Newfoundland, and I suspect the people who come from the so-called poor parts of this country, now more than ever before want their elected representatives, be they in the national parliament, be they in the legislatures, or at any level, to stand and be heard to oppose this bill which will limit the amount of money that the federal government will contribute under what was heretofore a 50/50 cost-shared program for social service purposes or welfare purposes in the provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

Who has been singled out for fiscal restraint in those provinces? Whether you are poor in P.E.I. or whether you are poor in Toronto, a poor Canadian, no matter where he or she lives, should expect from their national government exactly the same kind of proposed level of treatment. Somehow this government has got in its head the warped concept that it is better to be poor—or easier to be poor—in some provinces than in some others.

The people in the province where I come from, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador, know that is nonsense. Those who come home from Ontario or come home from Alberta, and many have come home because of the downturn in the economy, know it is easier—if you have got to be poor, God forbid—to be poor where you can still plant, in rural communities, a few vegetables; to be poor where you can still go out, hopefully, and share in a few fish, although there are not many left; to be poor, hopefully, where you can still go out and share in the moose that was taken down by a brother or cousin.

This warped concept that it is okay to limit, to pick on poor people in so-called rich provinces, is really the latest manifestation of the, may I suggest with great respect, warped mentality that emanates from those who offer this policy opposite. Who are we picking on if we stand as members and support this bill? I notice that many members choose not to speak, choose not to stand and support this bill. Many of them plan to vote for it. When the time comes to say aye or nay, they will be there to say “Aye, aye, I support the bill”. They are Conservative members of Parliament, but they do not dare to stand in their place and speak for this bill, defend

this bill, explain this bill, propose this bill. Why? Because who are we picking on? We are picking on single parent families, mentally and physically challenged people, the aged, children in care or in institutions who are in need of protection because of abuse or neglect, the unemployed, families and individuals who live in crisis and seek crisis assistance, low income workers, battered women.

We are not reducing a payment to provinces. We are not picking on—who is the provincial treasurer in Ontario?

An hon. member: Laughren.

Mr. Tobin: Laughren, Floyd Laughren. He has logged an awful lot of additional unemployment lately in Ontario under his stewardship. We are not picking on Floyd with this bill. We are not picking on the treasurer of Alberta or the new minister of finance in the province of British Columbia. This is not a case of a government putting the financial boots to another government or governments.

This is not simply a question of a paper transfer across governmental institutions. These are people of flesh and blood and they are the poorest people in our country. They are the people least able to make their voice heard. They are the people, because a lack of will and resolve on the part of governments and parliamentarians, whose voices in many instances result in the sound of silence. They are among the weakest, politically and economically, in our society and they are the last people we should ask to bear the burden of a recession. They are the first to be affected by a downturn in the economy, the last to recover from a downturn in the economy and they should be the last people we ask to bear the burden of government restraint measures.

What is going on is morally wrong.

• (1650)

This bill, Bill C-32, is morally wrong. I come from Newfoundland and I know that if I stay silent in Newfoundland as these punitive measures are imposed upon the weakest members of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta society, when the axe comes for those who live in Newfoundland there will be nobody left to stand and speak.