

*Government Orders*

life, whatever their income may happen to be, are entitled to some basic minimum level of social programs.

Today we are talking about old age pensions and about family allowances. We could equally be talking about education. We could be talking about medicare. These are things that we in Canada recognize should be for the benefit of all Canadians.

The government has recognized this in some of its own work. A consultation paper issued in January 1985 by the then Minister of National Health and Welfare stated on page 5:

The concept of universality is a keystone of our social safety net. Its integrity must not and will not be called into question.

The concept of a means test to determine eligibility for selective benefit programs is not appropriate. Eligibility for these programs, such as the child tax credit and the Guaranteed Income Supplement will continue to be determined on the basis of taxable income.

He talks further about an approach to reform in Chapter IV entitled "The Government's Current Approach to Reform" where he states:

A special surtax on Old Age Security payments to recover more of the benefit paid to upper income pensioners would seriously disrupt our retirement income system, both for current pensioners and those now planning for retirement, and would unduly penalize those most affected by reason of retirement income resulting from private savings in earlier years.

I suggest to you, Mr. Speaker, that in January 1985 the Minister of National Health and Welfare had it right. He was dead right. Why the government is now renegeing on this commitment to Canadians is a mystery to me. Of course, the government does not admit that it is renegeing. It says that this is not touching universality. If we put the old age pension into the right pocket and then fish it out from the left, we have not affected universality. We have just taxed it back.

At least somebody over there is willing to call a spade a spade and as usual that is the hon. member for Mississauga South. He is quoted in *The Ottawa Citizen* on September 23, 1989, as saying this:

We have decided to eliminate universality and we do that in a sense by the clawback in both family allowance and the old age pension.

As you know, it has been a Conservative philosophy for some time that distributions from the state ought to go essentially to those in need. While the clawback may be unfair and sneaky, it is there.

At least he tells the truth.

If we are going to change that principle of universality, at the very least Canadians should be able to participate in a discussion of the policy underlying it. Surely if we have had the principle of universality for many years in our country and we set about changing it, we ought to do it through a consultative process and not as part as a budget bill.

This point has been made by the Canadian Council on Social Development and others who have looked at this and said that surely we should have a discussion in Canada on universality. The time has come. Instead of doing that, this change is put in sneakily through the back door, through an amendment to the Income Tax Act, without hearing Canadians across the country on the issue that it is raising. Here we are under time allocation being forced, as a gift to our seniors and to our families in Canada, to see the adoption of this retrograde measure without full debate and consultation with Canadians.

The process that was started in January 1985 by the government across the way is one that should have been followed and should have been applied. This consultation paper ought to have resulted in a thorough study of the principle of universality so that Canadians could say what they thought. It is an important principle. It is important for a number of reasons.

It is important because of the nature of the programs that we have in Canada. Surely we do not want to move to a system where our social programs are only targeted to the poor because then they become poor people's programs. If we have a system of health care for the poor, the rich will buy the good health care and the poor will have what is left. If we have an educational system that is for the poor, then the rich will pay for a good education and the poor will get what is left.

When we start to whittle away at universality, where we end up is a system where our social programs are only for the poor because they are the only ones that have to accept them and the wealthy can buy what they want. Universality is also a reflection of the collective responsibility that a society assumes for its members. Old Age Security and family allowances are not meant to be transfers from the rich to the poor. They are meant to be transfers to those who are working and to those who are retired. They are meant to be transfers from those