

*Government Orders*

Putting a cap on CAP effectively is saying to the citizens of this country that we as a country and a nation are one of the most favoured on the face of the earth. We are one of the nations with the highest standard of living and the largest number of resources. Everyone of us in this Chamber knows what our benefits are. Yes, we have problems, largely of our making, and I am not apportioning blame on that side. We of all political stripes, from every region, province and territory of this country have to take a share in how we might be messing up the country. This is why we now have to work together to pull it together. But we are a favoured and blessed country, no question, on the world scene. We are favoured and blessed as opposed to our neighbour to the south.

A country will only maintain its greatness and its favoured status when it can be judged favourably in the way it treats its least fortunate and weakest members. There are Canadians who are never going to be able to function in the Thatcherite, Reaganite, Mulroneite free market kind of economy that this country has been pushed toward.

My colleague from Halifax West said, in response to my colleague from South West Nova, that you cannot do anything with a huge deficit and a bankrupt government. I could not agree more. No one disagrees with that. The deficit is a terrible burden.

• (1240)

It has been six years, and the deficit grows. There have been six years of these policies and it is not getting smaller. It is not helping—

**Mr. Gustafson:** Who created the deficit?

**Mr. Halliday:** It is the interest rates.

**Mrs. Clancy:** I thought the interest rates went down, my hon. friend over there, the hon. doctor. But you will have your time, the hon. member from over there. If you know the answer, why can you not fix it? You have had six years and you have not done anything. It is getting worse. I must have struck a nerve. They were not talking at all for a while, now they are all talking. I think they should speak on this in their own time. However, they have not solved this.

The Minister of Finance told us the other day we are faced with a 60-day freeze, and what is cut? What is always cut? Social programs to help the less fortunate; programs that reflect on our national characteristic of compassion are cut. Why?

I do not believe that my colleagues on the other side of the House want to think about people who are forced out of their homes and living in piano boxes, if they are

lucky. They are living under bridges, if they are lucky, and in the streets from one end of this country to the other. I know that none of the members over there approves of that or wants to see it, but it is happening. You cannot pretend it is not happening. It is there.

Let me tell you this. The other night in Halifax, when we had the biggest snowfall in the maritime region in 30 years, I was talking on the telephone to my friends because none of us could come out of our homes. We were lucky we had homes to be in. A number of people wondered what was happening that night to those homeless people that we see on the streets. Where were they? Three feet of snow fell on the city of Halifax. Thank God there were church shelters, temporary shelters, Salvation Army shelters and the like to take them in.

This is a temporary response. The churches and the charitable institutions cannot be expected, with their limited means and limited base, to take over what is the responsibility of every Canadian, and consequently has to be the responsibility of government. You cannot back off and abdicate your responsibility and say: "Let them starve. Let them eat cake. Let the charities take care of it". It will not work. We have seen more poverty and want in this country in the last six years than we have seen since the Great Depression.

I was born many years after the Great Depression, but my family lived through it, mostly in the coal mining towns of Cape Breton. I heard about what it was like. I heard about children starving to death. I heard about people freezing to death for want of heat and light. It is programs like the Canada Assistance Plan that provide a buffer against that kind of horror.

I stand here today proud of my country. I am passionately committed to my country and utterly determined that it is going to come through the crisis it is in, a better place than it was before. It will be a country that comprehends our regional, language and cultural differences. It will be one in which all Canadians can be strong together. But you know, it does not matter if we preserve our cultures and our two great languages. It does not matter what we do with any of these things, or whether we have asymmetrical federalism or an elected Senate. It does not matter to any of us as the duly elected representatives of the people, if there are people starving, going without, and living in want from Victoria to St. John's, from Windsor to Inuvik, because we are responsible. As responsible people we must continue to support the Canada Assistance Plan and not see it diminished nor allow our social safety net to be taken away. This is a Canadian heritage and a Canadian trust that is as important as our languages and our cultures and any of