

Government Orders

year to think about it, and withdraw this bill. This bill is the kind of legislation that flies in the face of the sanctimonious statements that have been made over and over again both in this House and out there in the real world by this government about how much it cares for children in Canada.

This legislation ensures that children in Canada are in fact not adequately funded. This legislation ensures that children in three provinces in particular do not enjoy the support of the federal government for programs pertaining to them. They do not enjoy the same support as children from the remaining seven provinces and the two territories.

What does that mean, Madam Speaker? Does that mean that the federal government cares less for the children of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia? Or does that mean that the federal government cares more for the children in the other provinces? Or does it mean that yet again we have legislation that has nothing to do with the care or welfare of children and nothing to do with caring about the poor in this country but has a whole lot to do with a neo-conservative program that is an intricate network of neo-conservative amendments and adjustments in the world of this government?

I suggest that this government plans very carefully this kind of legislation. I urge hon. members to support the motions and defeat Bill C-69, or have the government withdraw it because it does not meet the government's stated commitment to the children of Canada.

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Pierre Blais (Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak this afternoon to Bill C-69. I would like to start by telling the hon. member who just spoke that I agree all members in this House should deplore the fact that there are still people in this country who live in poverty. I myself come from a rural part of this country, and I have seen the situation evolve in recent years. I believe, Madam Speaker, that situations that have gone on for years and years cannot be changed overnight. As in every situation, I think we must look at how these things develop and then deal with the cause of the problems we are facing.

When we talk about poverty in Canada, poverty may be caused by a number of problems, but more often it is the result of loss or lack of employment. One subject—and the Prime Minister has repeated this many times here in the House—that has come up time and time again in this House is the state of family income in this country. However, the best social measure this government has taken in the past years was to provide Canadians with millions of jobs. Since we came to power, I believe 1,600,000 jobs were created. A government's top social priority, its first strategy to fight poverty in a country should be to provide employment, because employment will restore a person's ability to earn a living wage.

I wish my NDP colleague would listen to me as carefully as I did to her. Perhaps she and her party would then be able to go beyond their hollow rhetoric and look at what has been done in recent years and where this government wants to take Canada, Madam Speaker. What we have done since 1984, since the Minister of Finance gave his economic message in November 1984, has been to give this country a sense of direction. We realized that despite constant efforts, our debt levels had reached gigantic proportions, Madam Speaker. And we all found this very, very disturbing and we still do. We are afraid of a public debt growing at such an unbridled rate because it makes it more difficult to maintain and pay for existing programs and makes us apprehensive about the future for our children and grandchildren. When taxpayers' money, whether from taxes or individual and corporate income tax, is used more and more just to pay the interest, anyone can understand that. Canadians understand it very well.

However, we face a situation that has often rightly been called the "nimby syndrome", not in my back yard, because people never want any cuts whatever made in areas that affect them. We have noticed that and, as a government, over the years, especially in the last budget, we have had to make cuts that we too find difficult. Do not think that it is much easier for a government to raise spending by 20 per cent as the government that preceded us did for years, to increase spending by over 10 per cent, with frightful inflation rates of up to 10 or 12 per cent, which is absolutely intolerable for a country. So obviously, Madam Speaker, it was difficult—if I had been here in government in 1980, I would have found it hard to