

Family Income Security Plan

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, these people over there think they have done something about poverty. My hon. friend, the minister's colleague, should worry about the poverty of the Indians.

Mr. Chrétien: Yes, and they will also benefit from this legislation.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friends over there, both of whom have some experience of poverty in their background and who ought to understand it, seem to think that when they take one million people off the tax rolls, some of whom were paying taxes of \$10, \$15, or even \$100, they are placed in the class of the affluent and suddenly their poverty problems are solved. Merely relieving people of \$10, \$15 or even \$100 a year in taxation does not solve their basic problem of poverty. Giving people an extra \$8 or an extra \$10 a month per child of itself does not solve the problem of poverty.

I am as sure as I am that I am standing here that if the ministers opposite me this afternoon, the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien), were not here as members of a cabinet with all the power, authority and prestige they have—I see my friend laughing. Does he not have the power, authority and prestige I think he has? If they were just discussing this matter out of the chamber with some of us, out of their social concern, they would agree with me that what is needed in this country is social reform which moves in the direction of greater equality of income, and that we must bring up the incomes of those in the lower brackets and do it substantially. This business of a few dollars in the proposed legislation, or taking one million people off the tax rolls is peanuts and does not solve the problem at all.

Mr. Chrétien: You are voting against it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My friend says we are voting against it. We are not voting against the increase. We want an even larger increase. We are voting against the strings and against a government which thinks it is doing something for those in the lower brackets when at the same time it has given an increase amounting to tens of thousands of dollars a year to those in the upper brackets through changes in the income tax legislation.

Mr. Chrétien: That is not true.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It is true. Do not ask us to look at these things in isolation. One of the reasons we have this kind of responsible government where the government controls the purse strings, and so on, is to have some integrity about these things and to have them looked at together. The fact is that all these things must be taken together. The increase in old age pensions, what we have done for the veterans and what we have done for the children of families represent a total package. This does not solve the problem of poverty and does not redistribute income. Maybe there is some redistribution. The poverty of the poor is being redistributed because those a little less poor will pay more so that those who are very poor will get a little more. However, those in the upper brackets, because of the changes in the tax bill of last year, get far more.

[Mr. Munro.]

The minister stands up today—I was taking notes a dime a dozen—and says that one of the aims of the government was not to give money to those in the upper brackets and to those who did not need it so that these many millions of dollars could go somewhere else, to those who need it. It does not happen that way. Not giving this family allowance money to those in the middle and upper brackets does not result in more money going to those in the lower brackets. Until the government is prepared to come in with a total package that is deliberately aimed at redistributing the wealth of this country and raising the economic levels of our people so that no group in society is below the poverty line, this kind of legislation should not be put through. It should be taken back to the drawing board and improved so that it is something worth bringing in. The minister said that between four million and five million Canadians are living below the poverty line. What a statement from a Minister of National Health and Welfare of a country producing over \$90 billion worth of goods and services, with a population of a little over 20 million people!

Mr. Munro: Why are you voting against the bill?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The minister asks why we are voting against the bill. I have to come back to what I said at the start. He made a well constructed speech with excellent delivery, but he does not seem to have any appreciation of social philosophy and some of the real needs of our time. It is using a popgun against an atomic weapon for the minister to think that the kind of legislation he is bringing in today will do anything at all toward solving the problems of poverty in this country.

Our opposition to this bill is because we want something that will really tackle the problem of poverty. Even an adequate family allowance scheme would not do this, but a family allowance scheme that was simpler than this which paid everyone and in which there was no dividing of people into various groups would go in the right direction. What we need, along with that, is a program of really full employment and adequate social security measures right through the piece. We need programs of housing, urban development and anti-pollution. We do not want to have it said of Canada that it is a country that can produce \$90 billion worth of goods and services and yet have four million to five million people, 25 per cent of its population, living below the poverty line.

• (1710)

I said earlier that a number of strings were attached to this piece of legislation and I singled out the one that bothers me most, namely, that these people are called upon to put on the badge of poverty, to advertise it, to assert it. This is really the reason that for all these years some of us have argued for the principle of universality. I am going to be accused of saying things I have said before, things which some of my own colleagues may have said, but I have the floor so here it goes.

I well remember the attitude of the older people toward the pension when it had the means test attached to it. They were ashamed to admit they were drawing the old age pension. That was back in the 1930s and 1940s. I remember equally well the change that came about and