

is not content with cutting VIA Rail to pieces. It is not satisfied by withdrawing from unemployment and it is not very concerned about the negative impact the proposed goods and services tax will have on many middle and low-income Canadians. Instead, the Conservative agenda includes an outright attack on the universality of our social programs and the government is actually going after senior citizens and families.

The National Council on Welfare estimates that as the clawback proposal is not fully indexed to inflation, in less than 10 years more than one million Canadian families could be subject to a full or partial clawback of their family allowance benefits. The clawback proposal discriminates against one-income families and seniors. A single income family with two children with a net income of \$58,000 will lose all its family allowance benefits while a two-income family with one spouse earning \$45,000 and the other earning \$30,000 would escape the clawback. This despite the fact that their combined income totals \$75,000. This is by no means an example of fairness.

The clawback proposal is also unequal for senior citizens receiving the old age security pension. We should remember that seniors have already earned their pension as a result of the income tax they have paid over their working years. Now the government steps in and says, "Forget it, we are taxing back your pension regardless of what you have paid in taxes." There is something incredibly wrong with this kind of action from the government. Our seniors, regardless of their incomes today or in the future, are deserving of their old age security pensions. None of them should have to see a lifetime of work, savings, and taxes ignored by a single piece of legislation from this government. They deserve better treatment, far better treatment.

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The idea being expressed by the government with Bill C-28 is one which is very clear. The clawback proposal means that seniors and families in Canada do not count any more. Of course the government will argue that it is prepared to assist those who receive these two benefits by adjusting the threshold figure in the future, that there will be some element of fairness to protect the majority of recipients from the clawback.

Government Orders

We are left wondering when will the government actually come through on this promise? How badly will the \$50,000 threshold have to dip in real money terms before the government will raise it? How many recipients will have to be caught in the clawback net before the government announces an adjustment?

I certainly find no comfort in this empty promise. One need only remember the Prime Minister's own words on social programs being a "sacred trust". By looking at Bill C-28 we see how much that trust has been maintained by this government.

The Conservative government views the clawback of old age security and family allowance benefits as one means to address the federal deficit. Given that the government has played a considerable role in raising the deficit since being elected in 1984, I guess it would do just about anything to reduce it. However, there is a rather large problem in the logic of having seniors and families address the deficit through their social benefits. We all know that the reduction of the deficit is important to every Canadian, but is it fair or fiscally prudent to fight the deficit with our social programs? One voice, the Canadian Seniors Network, has stated, and I quote:

Why should a family pay more towards the deficit than a childless couple, and why should a pensioner pay more than a wage earner with the same income?

This group suggests it is incongruous for the government to introduce the clawback proposal which, in its opinion, will only recover a relatively insignificant amount when compared to the massive public debt. This organization has suggested that the same amount or even more revenue which the clawback would provide the government can in fact be generated by raising the top income tax bracket by a single percentage point. This would tax all high-income individuals and not single out old age pensioners and family allowance recipients with an individual net income of \$50,000 or more. The government, however, seems convinced that the clawback proposal, without full indexation, is the better route to take. The clawback is obviously punitive, unfair and a discriminatory measure.

There is no moral or fiscal justification for the government to proceed with this blatant attack on benefit recipients and our universal social programs. Why then is the government willing to implement the clawback? Why is it eager to dismantle universality?