

province, or through the province to the municipality where the latter administers social assistance programs, of social assistance programs as defined by the act.

This is a demand driven system in that expenditures are not discretionary. Expenditures must be made by the province to individuals deemed to be in need or likely to be in need. By limiting its participation to an increase of 5 per cent in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario the government is in fact not abiding by the terms of the agreement.

The federal government constitutionally is obliged to consult with the provinces prior to changing the terms of the agreement. Constitutional convention demands as much, and the act has made this requirement absolutely clear.

The provinces should in their planning have every right to expect that the federal government will continue to pay its share of costs under the Canada Assistance Plan unless they have agreed to change the terms of the agreement.

The federal government by acting unilaterally is in fact threatening the welfare of the poor. Single parents, children, the disabled and those needing special care will suffer and will do so because the federal government has removed support for their welfare.

These amendments make clear the responsibility of the federal government to consult with the provinces before changing the terms of the agreement that it has signed with the provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

The government by making this unilateral move is threatening the whole concept of co-operative federalism which has driven the fiscal relations between the provinces and the federal government for much of this century. One must ask why at a time of national turmoil the federal government is intent on driving the wedge of division on this issue even further.

As more than half of the poor in Canada live in the three provinces affected by Bill C-69, this measure cannot be seen simply as a restraint measure but as a fundamental change in the responsibility of the federal government for the welfare of Canadians, particularly our children, and for the redistribution of income in Canada. Therefore consultation is not only morally necessary but is in fact required by law.

### *Government Orders*

We have all noted that the Government of the province of British Columbia has indeed taken this matter to the courts, and we are awaiting a decision.

We have also noted that the department is in fact doing its own study on the effectiveness of the Canada Assistance Plan, on its costs and projections. We find it passing strange that the government is rushing through this piece of legislation before that report is finished. We suspect, and the proof will be in the pudding when the report is tabled, that in fact the government does not want to be told prior to it passing this legislation that the Canada Assistance Plan and the impact on provinces is so important to Canadians that it should not be amended in the way the government is planning.

In British Columbia we find that we have a government that in fact is not providing social assistance payments at a level that would bring families above the poverty line. We find in British Columbia that we have increasingly dramatically fast growing food-in-the-schools programs put together not by the provincial government, but by teachers and parents who are concerned when they see children coming to school hungry, when they see them falling asleep at their desks at 10 o'clock, when they see them increasingly having behaviour problems because they are hungry. What we find is a government that is not even meeting poverty level standards of social assistance in this country.

Now we have the federal government buying into that heavy-handed attitude toward the poor. The federal government has bought into it by saying: "It's okay. We will put a cap on it and then you will only have to increase it by 5 per cent and you can get off the hook".

That is not good enough for the poor in British Columbia. That is not good enough for the poor in Alberta. It is not good enough for the poor in Ontario.

Every group in this country that works for and looks after the needs of children will tell you that children who are hungry, children who are malnourished are children who will not have the opportunity to be full participants in this society. They will not have the opportunity to continue on in school. They will not function well and are, indeed, far more likely to be ill.

The Acting Prime Minister less than an hour ago stated in this House that children and their welfare are a priority of the government. In view of the fact that the Prime Minister today signed a document ratifying the UN Declaration for the Rights of the Child, and that if it is the policy of this government that the education, clothing, housing and feeding of the children of Canada is a priority, then I urge that the government very seriously re-think the passage of this legislation. It should pass this amendment, which would give an extra