

• (1020)

To whom does the government listen? Continuing the search of those interested, as I did, I found that the government does not listen to the John Howard Society, nor to the Canadian Child Welfare Association, nor to the Canadian Association of Social Workers, nor to the Canadian Teachers' Federation, nor to the Assembly of First Nations, nor to the Social Planning Councils of Metropolitan Toronto, Ottawa-Carleton, St. Catharines and Thorold, Hamilton, Peel or Richmond Hill, nor to the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Federation, nor to the Canadian Federation of Students, nor to the Canadian Council of Social Development, and not to the Salvation Army.

Why does the government not listen to these groups? Are they all irresponsible? Have these groups lost all touch with reality? Has the Salvation Army lost touch with the people? Are the John Howard Society, the Canadian Child Welfare Association, the Canadian Association of Social Workers, the Canadian Teachers' Federation, the Assembly of First Nations, the Social Planning Councils of these municipalities, the National Pensioners and Senior Citizens Foundation, the Canadian Federation of Students, the Canadian Council on Social Development and the Salvation Army all totally out of touch with reality?

Or is it the government that cannot see and cannot hear, that crosses the street to pass by these millions of Canadians who, especially now, need a Samaritan to stay on their side of the street and see what is happening rather than a Pharisee who crosses to the other side?

Why does no one support this legislation, apart from the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and a small cadre of supporters? We are seeing another version of the few instituting measures over the objections of the many. It is an outrage, of course, that the very people who caused the recession are now asking the sick, the hungry and the poor to bear its price. It is an outrage that the very people whose misguided interest rate policies have crippled our economy are asking poor children to pay the price of monetary policy and incompetence. It is an outrage that the very people who have destroyed our manufacturing industries are asking Canadians, thrown out of work because of that, to suffer even more through cutbacks in social assistance.

This bill dismantles a significant section of the Canada Assistance Plan. The objective of CAP was to help provinces provide adequate assistance and institutional care for persons in need, and welfare services designed to lessen, remove or prevent the causes and effects of poverty, child neglect, or dependence on public assistance. Bill C-32 ignores that objective for the provinces of Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia with their huge populations of the poor and those needing this very social assistance. As a result, it transfers the burden of the national debt and federal deficit onto the backs of the poor Canadians who are in these provinces. It is a disgrace.

[Senator Frith.]

Honourable senators, I urge you to listen to the words of the Canadian Cerebral Palsy Association when commenting on this legislation. They said:

The extraordinary suffering which it imposes on poor and disabled Canadians cannot be justified.

I agree. We on this side agree. The Liberal Party agrees. The legislation cannot be justified. I urge all honourable senators to think long and hard before they vote to support Bill C-32. Listen to your head, and also listen to your heart. They will both tell you to vote against this bill, as I intend to.

Hon. Philippe Deane Gigantès: Will the honourable Leader of the Opposition accept a question?

Senator Frith: Yes, of course.

Senator Gigantès: Might there not have been a misinterpretation by you of the remark by members of the government that "our children are the most important and most vulnerable members of society"? Perhaps they were talking about their own children, who are important to their fortunate parents and whose trust funds might be vulnerable to a change of government altering the rules a little and making those children less rich in the future.

Senator Frith: I admit that the quote would bear that interpretation, but I will leave it for others to accept or deny it.

Hon. Lowell Murray (Leader of the Government): Honourable senators, in view of what we have just heard, I think it needs to be stated for the record again that as a result of this bill the federal government's contribution to the Canada Assistance Plan in the three provinces affected, Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta, will increase by 5 per cent. A 5 per cent increase is more than twice as much as the increase in the cost of living. A 5 per cent increase is considerably—

Senator Thériault: Where does the cost of living come into that? Look at all the people without jobs.

Senator Murray: This is a debate for serious people, not for empty vessels who just make noise from their seats.

Senator Thériault: Be serious. Who believes you?

Senator Murray: A 5 per cent increase is considerably higher than the increase in federal government program expenditures in recent years. I am confident that a 5 per cent increase is considerably high than the increase the government of Ontario will be paying to its municipalities, schools, universities and hospitals. It is important to keep these matters in perspective.

Of course it is true that to be poor in a rich province is no better than to be poor in a less rich province, but the fact of the matter is that the governments of the richer provinces are in a better position to pay more to welfare recipients and others in need of the programs under the Canada Assistance Plan than are the governments of the poorer provinces. It is for that reason that there is no cap on the Canada Assistance Plan contributions going to the seven provinces which receive equalization.