I do not think I can stand here in this House and believe that today we are seeing the worst of what we call needy Canadians. We do not see jobs. We do not see an application of money to job creation and we do not see any new ideas. The Minister of Finance says that interest rates have gone down. Why have interest rates gone down? There is no demand. Interest rates will have to go down a lot further before ordinary Canadians can take advantage of them. Maybe big business or the government's friends who like to spend their Canadian dollars in the United States are benefiting. Certainly the Canadian dollar has not gone down enough to enable it to be spent on our natural resources to keep the people working.

• (1220)

Let me just tell you what the CAP covers. It covers persons who benefit from assistance and welfare services, including children who are in care or are in need of protection due to abuse or neglect. There are more children in Canada being neglected, particularly in the have provinces because their CAP has expired. It expired in Ontario and we heard the premier say that he cannot go it alone. Lift the cap and give us our social assistance under CAP.

In B.C. it expired and in Alberta it expires in early March. Do the people have to suffer because of the inability of this government to be flexible? I cannot say that this is an example of good government. I can say that I only saw one person rise on the other side to justify this government's policy. I would like to hear them tell me that people are not going to bed without shelter or food. I would like to hear them say that the 1 million who are on social assistance in Ontario are not hungry tonight. I would like to know if they have gone to a welfare office in the last week and asked how many people came to that door or how many people came looking for assistance from their constituency offices. That is the hard crunch that members of Parliament, members of the legislature, municipal council and town councillors have to go through because of the cap.

In February 1990 they did another thing. Under the established programs they capped a limit. Perhaps in many respects that is needed. But I do not feel it is needed when it is truly social assistance.

In my own province the government of the day brought in PharmaCare for seniors. This year seniors were asked to contribute. I can perhaps see the rationale for asking seniors to contribute a $3 fee for their pharmaceutical needs. It is perhaps justified in tough economic times. I cannot see cutting back to welfare recipients.

I just want to go back to some of the other programs that were capped. I think Canadians should see this. It was interesting, if anyone saw or read about what happened in Montreal this weekend. People came out and talked about federal-provincial programs that worked. Why are we, without a big debate, talking about doing away with this universality here in this House?

What else does it provide? It provides assistance for one parent families, the aged, the unemployed, and families or individuals in crisis. It provides for low income workers, battered women and mentally and physically disabled people.

It goes back to its primary objective. It was to support the provision by provinces of welfare services designed to lessen, remove or prevent the causes and effects of poverty, child neglect or dependence on public assistance.

It is capped in a province like Ontario supposedly because we were told by the minister that we have to taper.

We had the high interest rate because Ontario was in an overheated economy. They cap CAP. A year later Ontario is in a depression because there are no jobs. Free trade has done away with most of the jobs. It was implemented in such a way that the government absolutely could care less about where the jobs were being lost. There was a high Canadian dollar when the free trade agreement was being implemented, and a high Canadian dollar for our natural resources was just not going to keep most of those jobs going.

Rio Algom just closed because of the high Canadian dollar and the international price of tin. You may not be able to control the international price of tin, but this government can control a high Canadian dollar. It does nothing to help or protect fisheries, the price of fish or the price of anything we export.

The only time the high Canadian dollar helps is when you want to go to the United States to spend our Canadian dollars. I say that if Canadians can afford to go to the United States, they can afford to take the breaks of the lower dollar.