

Government Orders

A one-earner couple earning \$56,000 will pay back all its family allowance. The two-income couple earning \$80,000—\$24,000 more than the one-earner family that I just spoke of—gets to keep over half of its family allowance. I would like to ask hon. members opposite how that can be considered fair. That is what the government introduced. It is still there with the Senate amendments. I would like to ask all hon. members assembled if they believe that that is fair. Not only have we abandoned universality, now we are creating inequities.

• (1800)

The clawback will add to the complexity of the child benefit system. After the clawback, there will be four types of families receiving family allowance: one, who will keep all of their family allowance because they are too poor to owe income tax. The second will be those who keep part of their family allowance, because they pay regular income tax on their benefits. The third group consists of those who keep part of their family allowance because they pay regular income tax and the clawback is going to take place on their benefits. Fourth, those who will pay all of their family allowance back because of the clawback.

Fairness and equity apply. As the hon. members on the government side of the House know, the clawback will not redirect benefits from the rich to the poor. That is the basis on which the government is trying to sell this bill. They are telling people in Canada: "We will take it from the rich people who make \$50,000 a year and we will give it to the poor."

I have never ever believed and I do not think anybody in this House believes that the Conservative government from across the way is Robin Hood, taking from the rich and giving to the poor. Never, never, never has this government taken from the rich and given to the poor.

The clawback on family allowance and old age pensions will save the government about \$500 million a year when this game is fully in effect. When I finish speaking, I would like to have the hon. minister who spoke earlier tell us how that \$500 million a year will be given to the poor in this country. I defy him to get up and tell us that that \$500 million is going to go to the poor.

We believe that the federal government should abandon the clawback proposals in Bill C-28. There is no question that those clawbacks put an end to universality both in pensions and in family allowance.

The National Council of Welfare, a citizens' advisory body to the Minister of National Health and Welfare and appointed by the cabinet to advise the minister on matters of social policy, believes that this legislation should not have ever occurred. It believes that this legislation is putting the death stamp on universality in this country.

The other point is the absolute shock when one starts looking at where this government introduces its social policy. This government does not introduce social policy through the Minister of National Health and Welfare or through other ministers in this government. Where does it introduce social policy? It introduces it in the budget, buried in figures so that people have no realization of how bad these amendments are.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare does not stand up and say: "We are going to grab back part of your pension or part of your family allowance." The minister responsible for pensions does not jump up and say: "We are going to grab back part of your pension." Never. This government introduces it in a budget with figures that even the most astute people in the media and in this House along with their advisers take days and weeks to figure out.

The government expects ordinary, average Canadians to figure out that they are getting the shaft from this government. I have news for you, Mr. Speaker. The average Canadian could never figure out what is in those budget documents. It is absolutely shocking that this government hides its dastardly deeds in the confines of huge budgetary documents.

This country introduced universality in the family allowance, medicare, old age pensions, the programs that are so important to what makes our society special as caring Canadians. Nobody ever dreamed that we would find ourselves faced with a government that through the guise of trying to achieve a level playing field—and maybe that is the reason—gives us reasons for balancing budgets. Yet, it spends on the other end and takes it away on the social programs. We give it on the