

Family Allowances Act, 1973

Mr. Benjamin: If I could take all day, I would. Since 1924 people in this kind of Party have been fighting in Parliament for universal programs, beginning with J. S. Woodsworth. When the Government of any political stripe impinges on, detracts from or attempts to reduce or destroy the universality and the benefits of universal programs, this Party will always oppose them.

We are in the midst of the worst social and economic crisis since the dirty thirties. This is a depression, not a recession, but a depression of a different kind. It is interesting to read the speeches of Prime Ministers and Ministers of Finance between 1929 and 1939. They show the same state of mind and they are the same kinds of speeches that were being made between 1979 and 1982. I quote one of them:

The policies and measures I have outlined are based upon the firm belief . . . that this country is soon to enter upon a new era of prosperity—

That was Lyman P. Duff, the Minister of Finance, speaking on March 12, 1931, as reported at page 3 of *Hansard*. I again quote:

—I told the electorate that there was one thing of which they could be perfectly certain, and that one thing was that if our Party were elected to power, at the very first opportunity we would enact legislation that would deal not only with unemployment but also with the question of affording to Canadians an equal opportunity with their competitors—

That was R. B. Bennett on March 17, 1931, as reported at page 57 of *Hansard*. The same right hon. gentleman said on June 29, 1931 as reported at page 3137 of *Hansard*:

• (1500)

The primary duty with respect to unemployment does not rest with the federal Government—

In *Hansard* of June 30, 1931, at page 3183, Mr. Bennett said:

For as has been very often pointed out and is generally recognized, the duty rests primarily with the municipalities and with the province—

An Hon. Member: We heard that last week from the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde).

Mr. Benjamin: We heard that last week, and we also heard it today from the Minister.

Let me move to another quote. Mackenzie King, at page 1041 of *Hansard* on February 19, 1937, said this:

During that period much was expended for social services, to the neglect of what should have been expended for the purpose of keeping the defences of our country up to the standard to which they should have been kept.

And then Mr. Bennett, at page 1393 of *Hansard* on March 2, 1937, said this:

It came to me as somewhat of a surprise that this country had the measure of prosperity that it did have in 1935.

Also at the same page and on the same date Mr. Bennett said:

If we are to make this country attractive to new capital; if we are to induce people to invest their money in this country, we shall have to have regard to the

fact that taxation is a very important item in the minds of those who are sending their capital to new countries.

Those kinds of speeches have been made in the House just in these past three years, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Bennett went on to say, on March 1, 1937, "that this House regrets that the government has failed to take effective measures to deal with the problem of unemployment". On March 24, 1937, at page 2171 of *Hansard*, the same gentleman said:

Here we have a complete reversal of policy; here we have blank cheques issued for every form of activity that was contemplated by the relief act to the extent of twelve millions of dollars—

I mention these quotes, and there are many more, to illustrate the kinds of speeches which have been coming from the old line Parties on the matter of universal programs, matters of unemployment and taxation, and how they attack universal programs like the Family Allowances Program, attack it by chiselling on the benefits of a universal program.

I would like to quote the following sentence from the CCF Winnipeg Declaration of 1956, "A society motivated only by a desire for profit is basically immoral." A nation which will put up \$8 billion for fighter planes, which my hon. colleague from Kamloops-Shuswap (Mr. Riis) referred to, at \$35 million each, which are of no use to us, instead of investing that kind of money in food production, fishermen, farmers or our children, surely has its priorities reversed. A nation which permits its financial system to invest billions of dollars in new, towering bank headquarters, corporate mergers and fancy office buildings, while people are losing their homes, their farms, their small businesses, and having their Family Allowances reduced, surely that nation is suffering from a conscience which has gone askew.

A nation which permits billions of dollars of investment capital to cross our borders to speculate on foreign currencies and commodities to make quick profits while those billions of dollars are desperately needed here for mortgage rates geared to income for homes, senior citizens' housing, transportation, research and development, and children, cannot be forgiven. A nation which will chisel on the increases for Old Age Assistance, Family Allowances and the poor, is surely failing the test of any civilized society, namely, how well it treats its old, its young and its disadvantaged. We need a national recovery plan that challenges Canadians, that does not pick upon those who cannot defend themselves.

There have been calls from the Government side about more responsibility on the part of the Provinces. Let me illustrate with an example of another old Party government, the Conservatives in Saskatchewan who, by chiselling the public, cancelled the next two planned 25-cents' per hour increases in the minimum wage. When it comes to being cheapskates, they make the Liberals look like amateurs.