

tions given by the Prime Minister, by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) and by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson), I believe when properly tabulated and analysed, will put the Government in a straight-jacket and in a box. They have expressed reaffirmation apparently in universality of delivery. They have said there is no tax-back. When you look through the options available, I fear that if they are going to fulfil any kind of commitment, it really means a general tax increase.

I would urge Members of the House during the recess to examine the statements that have been given to us during the past week and a half. We asked the Government to move up the date of the Budget so that Canadians could find out whether they are going to get benefits or not. The Government refused. We asked the Prime Minister to ask his Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Health and Welfare to accelerate the publication of those directional papers on family allowances and pensions so Canadians could know the intentions of their Government. The Government refused. I suspect the partial reasons for that refusal, and perhaps the main reason, is that those papers, in the light of what has been said in this House in respect to questions that have been strongly directed in this House, will have to be rewritten by the Minister to reflect the views of the Opposition and the views of the people of Canada.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): I asked the Prime Minister to give Canadians at the very least a clear, simple statement of the intention of his Government. He refused. Instead, Sir, he accuses us of nit-picking. I refer to *Hansard* for December 14, at page 1237, in this respect. All I can say to the Prime Minister is that if this Government continues to create confusion and mistrust on programs affecting millions of Canadians, he had better get accustomed to our nit-picking because we intend to keep talking, and talking, and talking on this issue until it is clarified once and for all.

Instead of answers, all we are getting in response to serious questions on this fundamental and vital subject is a series of one-liners and jokes. I want to tell the Prime Minister that this House is not a vaudeville stage. This House is not a burlesque theatre. We have an obligation to our constituents and to all Canadians to live up to the enormous trust they have given us by sending us here to represent them. We have an obligation to have well informed and reasoned discussion on the question before us. We cannot have informed discussion when the Government will only hint at what its intentions are. We cannot have informed discussion if the Government will not answer simple questions but instead play frivolous and unbecoming games with an issue that touches millions upon millions of Canadians.

This debate came about because we on this side of the House in the Official Opposition put pressure on the Government one way or the other, in the budget, in a statement or even in an answer to questions, to clear up the ambiguity and keep its commitment not to tamper with the universal social

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programs. This debate will not end, Mr. Speaker, not today, not next year, until there is a clear, unmistakable, credible, believable and unassailable commitment from this Government that it will not tamper with the universality of the social programs in this country, which are counted on by millions upon millions of Canadians. They are part of the social contract, part of the glue, the adhesion and the unity that have made this country a very decent place to live.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Edward Broadbent (Oshawa): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to participate in this debate. I just regret that the debate has become a necessity. As the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner) has just indicated, we on this side of the House, both opposition Parties in this context, have called for this debate. We called for a serious discussion during the course of this week precisely because what was regarded as a permanent part of the social and political life of this country, namely our existing social programs and the principle of universality on which they were grounded, has been called into question. Indeed, it has been threatened by what I can only describe in this context as a Government which is insensitive and uncaring about the universality principle.

● (1250)

In the time period which we have allocated by agreement among all Parties, I want to begin to put this debate in perhaps a broader context than the debate has normally been dealt with, certainly in Question Period. Question Period does not exactly lend itself to philosophical speculation. The kind of debate which is just beginning this day, the last day before the Christmas break, and which will be resumed in the New Year, could only be taking place in a modern society.

There are Members in all Parties who are not only members of the Christian faith but of others. I say to my colleagues that if we were back in medieval times, this debate would seem absolutely and utterly ridiculous. In the pre-modern or pre-market society, it was assumed that all men and women had a set of reciprocal rights and responsibilities. The goods and the benefits which were to be distributed were not to be done on the basis of a market. Distribution was to be done on the basis of a cash connection, that is, if one has the cash one could buy it and if not one has to go to charity. That came later.

My key point is that not long ago in the history of humanity there was an assumption, or certainly a core notion of Christendom, that a social contract existed among members of society to share in its benefits. Along came the market mechanism which effectively broke down the set of reciprocal rights and obligations in society. We saw developed in the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries a view of society which had radically been transformed over that period of time. Everything was taken out of a set of communal or shared responsibilities and put into the market.

Then we saw a reaction because we had seen what it led to. On one hand it led to the creation of the greatest amount of wealth in the history of humanity. Of course, I am talking