

Government Orders

of social programs that most of us believe were part of the fabric of this country.

It used to be everyone's right as a Canadian to have equal access to social programs. That is no longer true. That contract has been broken. Universality is such a simple idea, really. It is so easy to understand. It is the expression of a belief that over a lifetime every Canadian contributes to the building and flourishing of this society in their own way, and to the best of their ability, and that no one should be shut out from the benefits of the country that they have helped to build. That is universality.

In most instances its benefits are taxable in the hands of the receiver based on income levels. That is a fair and universal approach. The member thinks that is what they have done but it is not so.

We must remember that universality survived governments of both political parties, survived recessions and, indeed, grew out of the depression. Yet this spirit and tradition of a government looking out for the health and welfare of every Canadian, no matter where they live, no matter what their means, has come to a sudden end with this government since 1984.

Universality has become little more than words on a paper, words offered to Canadians on the one hand, then quickly erased with the other. How familiar we are with the Prime Minister standing before a crowd and declaring to all the country that our social programs were a sacred trust. Yes, there were days when this government's smooth rhetoric tricked Canadians into believing it shared this caring approach to social programs.

But it seems to have been a mask behind which has lain the real truth. Time after time this government has used fast talk and colourful packaging to hide from Canadians the true facts of the slow and determined dismantling of universal access to social programs and, in particular, the old age security for which these people have already paid. They started paying in 1952 and to this day they have been paying. But this government does not care to acknowledge this.

If it was a private sector pension plan, this government would not have allowed this kind of action for one second, but because it is the public sector it feels it can

just go about doing this without consulting the public and to the detriment of everyone in this country.

In five long years of opposition we have been devoting endless energy trying to stop this government's slow piece by piece erosion of social benefits.

It was early in their mandate that the unravelling really took place. I go back to December 21, 1984, just weeks after the Conservatives took office, when the finance minister first proposed the de-indexing of old age pensions. We know what happened. We know what Madam Solange Denis said and we knew that Pinocchio's nose was getting longer and longer.

Liberals began to battle with this government because they could not seem to understand why we were so committed to universality. It is because Canadians believed in fairness and in equality.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Belsher: Be nice.

Mrs. Finestone: I am sorry. If the shoe fits, you have to wear it even if it is uncomfortable. Canadians believe in fairness and equality. Canadians believe that all individuals, no matter what their social status, deserve equitable treatment. I want members opposite to listen because when you segregate services only to the very needy then those services meant only for the poor become very poor services. If you do not have a vested interest then you do not take care. That is the great concern we have.

I would like to talk about the clawback from our pensioners of Old Age Security benefits from certain income groups and family allowance benefits from families, both where their incomes are over \$50,000 a year. On top of choosing this arbitrary figure as a cut-off, the government will not allow this figure to grow with inflation. It is allowing for only partial inflation protection of 3 per cent.

Once again we see the two faces of this government with the introduction of the clawback at a time when the spectre of the elections have hardly faded so dimly that we cannot recall the Prime Minister with his arm lovingly placed around his mother and saying, "Dear Mom" in Summerside, P.E.I., "as long as I am Prime Minister of Canada social benefits, especially those for the elderly, will be improved not diminished by our government". You wondered why I said Pinocchio before. It is another