

Family Allowances Act

Budget that tries to deindex senior citizens' pensions on the one hand, and on the other give a \$125,000 cash bonanza to the most affluent in our society by means of a capital gains deduction? Where is the fairness, where is the equity? There was none in that Budget.

The Government recognized that the proposal to deindex senior citizens' pensions was not fair, equitable or just. As a result of the position taken by the Opposition in this Parliament and as a result of a groundswell of opposition to that measure, the Conservative Government had to back down. It had to admit to the people of Canada that what it proposed to do was a mistake. It was unfair. However, not only that measure was unfair, so is this measure we find in Bill C-70. It is an attempt by the Government to deindex family allowance payments.

In his opening comments, the Minister indicated it was the intention of the Government to give more to the needy in society and that Bill C-70 would not only do that, it would also attack the deficit. I need not say that this Government is preoccupied with deficit reduction. It is paranoid about the deficit. It is for that reason we have this Bill before us. It is not, as the Government says, to help those most in need in our society.

If we closely examine the motivation of this Government it is easy to conclude that it is motivated by debt and deficit reduction. That is why this measure is before Parliament. Well, I say to Hon. Members opposite that we in the Liberal Opposition are concerned about the deficit as well. We believe in fiscal responsibility. We believe as parliamentarians and as a Government that we must act responsibly when it comes to the finances of the nation. However, unlike the Conservative Government we believe in people. We believe in families. We believe in children. We care about families and children. This Conservative Government does not appear to care. It is quite prepared to reduce the deficit on the backs of the disadvantaged in our society. Where is the justice, where is the fairness? We in Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition say, if you want to reduce the deficit, do not do it on the backs of the disadvantaged, the poor, the elderly, the young and the unemployed because we will not put up with it. We will fight you every inch of the way. If the Government is concerned about reducing the deficit, then let us be fair and just about it. If the goal of this Government is to redistribute the wealth in this society so that those most in need receive more, then let us not tinker with universality. Let us not assault the social safety net. If the Government is truly concerned about giving more money to the needy, then let us talk about reforming the tax system. Let us talk about a minimum tax on the rich.

In the last election campaign, indeed in this House, Conservative Members indicated that they intended to bring in a minimum tax. Well, here we are a year later and where is that minimum tax on the rich? Where is the fairness and equity in allowing people earning \$100,000 or \$200,000 to avoid paying any taxes at all? Where is the justice? There is none.

This Government believes that Government is in business to reduce the deficit. Members opposite believe that running this

country is like running a business. You know as well as I do that the purpose of a business is to show profit. You must show to your shareholders that you are balancing the books and you are showing a profit. On the other hand, we in the Opposition believe that Government is in business to serve people. Yes, it is quite possible to eliminate the deficit overnight. We all know that. We can do that, no problem at all. Let us get rid of universality and unemployment insurance. Let us get rid of all the transfer payments to the provinces regarding health and education. If we do that, we can eliminate the deficit, no question. But Canadians do not want that. We have a standard of living second to none and Canadians have come to expect and appreciate the highest level of health care and education in the world. Canadians have come to appreciate the fact that regardless of where you live in this great country you will receive a high level of education. But Canadians do not want our standard of living to be affected.

I note that you have indicated that I have but a minute left, Mr. Speaker. In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, this piece of legislation is regressive, anti-family, and anti-children. I hope that the Government will reconsider and withdraw this unfair piece of legislation, just as it did the proposal to deindex senior citizens' pensions. If the Government truly believes in helping the needy and less fortunate in our society, let us talk about a more equitable and more progressive income tax system.

● (1220)

Mr. Jim Edwards (Edmonton South): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak in this very important debate. We have heard some suggestions that the Bill before us and the policy which it represents are sneaky. I suggest to you that there is nothing more sneaky than theft, particularly theft in the night. It was the previous Government that stole Canada's Visa card and ran up \$8,000 of charges on it for each man, woman, and child in the country. It cannot be paid off. The previous Government would not pay it off. The interest is accumulating at \$100 per individual per month and more charges were made at a rate exceeding \$1,000 a year for each person in the country until the present Government took office.

This Government is determined to bring the Canadian spending spree to a halt, but not at the expense of social programs. This Bill is about fairness, not sneakiness. The previous speaker referred to some sense of paranoia about the deficit. I would ask him what he would do about the deficit. Would he monetize it? The Liberal Party was at one time interested in balancing the books of this country. Where have its morals and principles gone?

In all seriousness, Mr. Speaker, one of the difficulties which besets us is the fact that following the calamity of World War II our entire system was geared to a preindustrial society. Suddenly most western Governments became affluent and demands were made upon them in the area of invasion of the economy generally that had never been anticipated. Governments responded to those demands, the people responded to