

Borrowing Authority

● (1530)

This Government has to learn a fundamental lesson. The Conservatives should do in office what they said they would do during the campaign. They should not be acting like a two-headed monster, one head for the election and one head for government. On November 8, they outlined their economic policy concerning the reduction of public spending, not jobs as they promised. They have really started to put their social policy on the national agenda. They have managed to do this amidst a great deal of confusion, which is very sad because during the campaign the Prime Minister (Mr. Mulroney) said that universality was a sacred trust. He knew that universal social programs received broad public support across this country and he wanted to make sure he had sufficient support to be elected. Now that he is in office, he is sowing seeds of doubt about the principle of universality for pensions and family allowances. If the Conservatives succeed in this, when will they move on to medicare? They are simply testing the will of the Canadian people by flying a lot of trial balloons. If they get away with tampering with universal social programs such as family allowances and pensions, they will move right down the road to attack medical services.

Another thing the Conservatives said during the campaign was that they would run a co-operative approach to government. They would consult with people and act in a co-operative fashion to draw the community together. Well, Mr. Speaker, we begin to get the impression that their approach to consultation is really a smokescreen for their own real agenda. I am not so sure that we could say it is a hidden agenda because they are floating their ideas in various documents issued to the public. But certainly they have a very specific agenda and very specific direction, so that their promises of consultation and co-operation really wear thin. It looks more like a cover for the policies they wish to implement. The Hon. Member across the way laughs. These are serious questions, Mr. Speaker.

Pensions are a very good example, Mr. Speaker, of why universality is a cornerstone principle of our social policies in this country. Before we established public pensions people simply had to rely upon private pensions. Not everyone had access to a pension when it came to retirement, regardless of how hard they worked. So the notion of public pensions for everyone arose because people were concerned about the fact that everyone had a right to dignity in their old age through a secure income.

There is no way that a selective pension plan could work and provide security for all Canadians. First and foremost, the notion of universality applies to pensions, but it is also important with regard to family allowances. It is important not only because all children across this country deserve to have their basic needs met, deserve to have a good Christmas, deserve to have toys like the neighbours have, as well as proper clothes to go to school in. It is important because it is not simply for the children. One of the reasons family allowances were introduced and made payable to the mother rather than the father is that we were concerned that all women have some income

they can call their own. For a long period of time, perhaps even today, there were women who did not have an income that was strictly under their control.

To conclude, Mr. Speaker, the Government needs to clear up the confusion it has spread in the area of social policy because it is causing a great deal of concern among people. One of the fundamental principles of the social contract in this country is that all people have the right to social support because all Canadians pay for those programs. It is not enough to just say that the social programs are for the needy only. We need programs for all Canadians if they are going to be adequately funded and adequately supported politically throughout the country.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Sheila Copps (Hamilton East): Mr. Speaker, today tomorrow and Sunday, all Members will be going home to celebrate Christmas. Speaking for myself and on behalf of my Party, I would like to wish all Members of this House a very Merry Christmas.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is very unfortunate that in the House, today, Progressive Conservative Members failed to clear up once and for all what is going to happen to universality.

I have already received many telephone calls, and I know that other Members including Conservative Members have also received calls from their constituents, from senior citizens and young mothers who want to know what is going to happen to their pension cheques and family allowance.

We were waiting . . . we on this side resorted to some very strong tactics this week—

An Hon. Member: A public confession!

Ms. Copps: —in order to ask the House for a debate on universality. Because we in this Party—

Mr. Masse: Let us call it the bogeyman party!

Ms. Copps: —it was our Party that initiated these programs and our Party is going to defend them to the very end.

Mr. Speaker, what happened this afternoon when we finally gave Conservative Members a chance to tell the truth—

Mr. Masse: The truth?

Ms. Copps: —what did they talk about? I would like to use the words said by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp), for instance.

[*English*]

The Minister's comments, when he was discussing universality, were with regard to the perverse features of the status quo. The Hon. Member for Brampton-Georgetown (Mr. McDermid), when he was speaking about universality, what did he have to say on the issue? I quote: "I am not concerned about