

Family Income Security Plan

and the government would like to test the electorate on this issue and use it as something on which to go to the people, we are willing to withstand any type of criticism they may suggest with regard to our opposition to this bill. It has been said, and I think it bears repeating, that the type of bill we have before us indicates that the minister is not prepared to accept this type of assumption. It is a cruel hoax on the people of this country; it will divide our society as it has never been divided; our society will be divided into haves and have-nots.

The minister spoke about old age pensioners not being affected by this type of means test. He is not in touch with the people of this country. He cannot be reading his mail. The people of Canada do not like to be put on a selective basis. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre stated, the bill introduced within the last two years was a type of omnibus bill; you had to vote for it in order for some people to receive benefits. However, the selectivity part of this bill is not needed and we have no intention of supporting that proposition.

The minister asked why we did not look at the issues when the previous bill was before us. He said they were essentially the same. So far in this House we have seen a game of musical chairs. When one minister gets into some trouble, the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) appoints another minister to that portfolio. We never know what type of legislation will be introduced until second reading stage. This can happen with any legislation the Liberal government introduces into the House.

We thought that Liberal philosophy was somewhat concerned with the people of Canada but we have found it is no different from Conservative philosophy in so far as concerns recognition of the rights of the individual. It is time the people of this country realized there is not much difference between the Conservatives and the Liberals. This bill is a good indication of that fact.

About two years ago Canada had two major social security programs, the old age security and the family allowances programs. These programs were supposed to be universal in character, a right of the individual with no type of means test. It was ably brought out this afternoon that the old age security legislation providing for the 42-cent increase violated the principle of universal coverage. We now see that the bill before us is based on a means test. Payments are not universal; they will not be made as a matter of right. Surely the minister can appreciate the argument that these two pieces of legislation should be universal in their application rather than selective.

• (1750)

The government has abandoned the principle of universality and entered into the dark, suspicious, degrading, double-standard area of selectivity. There is no escaping the fact that under selectivity there will be a double standard, a degrading, suspicious area in which people will be assessed and documented in a computerized society. They will be subject to a means test, and there is really no need for such a test to be applied. We do not need to perpetuate a society composed of haves and have-nots, yet this is exactly what the legislation would do. A means test in this context is not only objectionable in itself; it is

objectionable because it is burdensome in terms of administration. Many speakers on this side of the House have described the bureaucratic set-up which is involved, the administrative confusion which this bill will bring about.

As an illustration of the government's misguided thinking, let me refer to the attempt which is being made to deal with the problem of regional disparity. On one hand the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury) is trying to insist on regional rates of pay in his negotiations with the Public Service Alliance; on the other hand the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) is spending millions of dollars trying to bring about a situation designed to eliminate regional disparities. In effect, the President of the Treasury Board is following the same principle as is contained in the bill before us. I use this as an analogy, one which throws light on this bill.

On one hand the government professes to abhor discrimination, but they are still applying discrimination between groups in the public service, on a geographical basis. A similar situation arises with respect to Bill C-170 where discrimination from now on will be shown when dealing with people who formerly were entitled as of right to the benefits of this legislation.

Even though there has been a rise in the cost of living amounting to 230 per cent since 1945, we could probably accept the minister's figures of \$15 and \$20 if these payments were distributed in the way they should be distributed. The minister says the bill is designed to rid the country of pockets of poverty. Will this, indeed, be the result or will it create a situation in which certain people are forced into a category from which they cannot escape?

I smile when I hear the Minister of National Health and Welfare say that people are not really concerned about knowing who receives what cheque or in what amount. I am sure he realizes that they are concerned about that, and to pretend otherwise is nonsense. We have all heard about the computerized society. I suppose many of us have read the book entitled "Future Shock." We know that today people are wondering exactly where they are going. They are beginning to realize that the system under which we are operating is a complete shambles. They realize they are becoming just numbers fed into a computer. They are faced with decisions of increasing complexity and are wondering how they can get out.

I understand that copies of the proposed new 1972 income tax return have been sent out to certain accountants for their observations and comments. I also understand that the 1972 tax return is red tape personified. There is no question that if one couples Bill C-170 with the 1972 income tax return, the only way in which those concerned will be able to work out what benefits they are entitled to receive will be to hire an accountant or a lawyer. If we suggest the principle of universal coverage and adopt the amendment which our party has introduced, we can at least escape the consequences of some of the rhetoric the minister has been using. As it is, the government appears to be showing no real concern for social justice or the equitable distribution of income in accordance with the social needs of our people. If time were available, I am sure we could continue for a long