

Government Orders

major problem, that is, those with low and middle-incomes and their retirement years.

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed the comments of the hon. member for Essex—Kent. They were certainly a little different than what we were led to believe was the position of the Liberal party.

My first question to him would be this. Were his remarks representative of the Liberal party and in fact will the Liberal party be opposing this legislation?

One has to keep in mind that the government claims, and it appears now to be correct, that many of the proposals in this legislation originated from the pension reform proposals of Mr. Marc Lalonde, the last Liberal minister of finance.

If the hon. member's comments are indeed representative of the Liberal party, then the Liberal party has changed somewhat in its position *vis-à-vis* pension reform.

My second question to him is this. While he very eloquently exhibited the unfairness of the system in terms of tax benefits, that because it is a tax deduction rather than a tax credit, those with higher incomes will of course receive much greater tax benefit from their pension contributions than those in the lower-income brackets who are paying a lower rate. I did not hear him talk about the importance of a universal pension program.

We know that with the Conservative agenda, part of the privatization agenda is also the privatization of the pension fields. Our speakers and our position has always been that we need a public pension system that provides an adequate pension for every man and woman in this country when they retire. I would really be interested in hearing the position of the Liberal party on that. Can we hear from them a reaffirmation of the importance of a public pension system, rather than relying on the trickery of the new right agenda?

Mr. Pickard: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate standing and being able to answer the questions that have been brought forward.

My comments were very much directed toward inadequacies that I see in the legislation. The Liberal party, being the open party and the straightforward party it is has very clearly decided as well that we would like, as Mr. Young said, experts to come in and look at these very

specific points that are being brought up. We would like to examine all of that legislation very carefully.

Without question, it is so important that we state the viewpoints, the concerns we have, and then be willing to listen to the experts and their comments with regard to those problems.

So my viewpoint very clearly is the viewpoint of the Liberal party, and the Liberal party wishes to have those issues brought forth to the Canadian public. But I think it is also in part a responsibility of any opposition party to point out where they feel there are weaknesses and concerns, and let those concerns be heard.

I feel that, yes, I am very consistent with the viewpoints I have and my colleagues have with regard to this legislation.

Second, you bring us back to 1984, and ask that we visualize things in 1990 the way they were in 1984. When we talk about the disparities that I see here, I realize that my colleague, Mr. Lalonde, brought forward legislation that would bring the levels of taxation contributions up to \$15,500. As well, that was good in 1984. However, in 1984, we were not facing a \$350 billion debt. We were not facing huge government cuts. We were not facing the policies that we are facing today. As a result, I would say that you cannot compare oranges to oranges over time. Things do change. I believe that in this particular case things have changed.

Mr. de Jong: Mr. Speaker, certainly the opportunity of asking questions gives one the ability to get more revealing statements on the record. Of course, what is unfair today, certainly was not fair back then. To be sure, I really do not believe what the hon. member is saying about back in 1984. He said that the country could afford unfairnesses more than it can now. That is what the member is saying.

The member, in essence, in his remarks stated the unfairness in the proposed changes. He stated the unfairness in having a tax deduction rather than a tax credit system that allows those in the higher income groups to benefit more than those in the lower income groups. Of course, those who pay no tax at all are not going to benefit at all. They are not going to get any tax benefits out of these proposals.

His remarks were very much to that point. Unfortunately, I also find that he was unable to clearly tell the House that his remarks really represented the Liberal