

Family Income Security Plan

The minister enjoyed using the word cynicism in the course of his speech. I did not count the number of times it appeared but it must have been a dozen or 15. Let me say to him, as one who for nearly three decades has been opposing needs and means and income tests, as one who has demonstrated a firm belief in the principle of universality, that I am not touched at all by his suggestion that our opposition to this bill because it does not stick by the principle of universality is a case of political cynicism, and I suggest to the minister that he himself knows better.

The hon. gentleman also appeared to derive some pleasure by affecting to discern a change in the position of this party between March 24, when I made the first speech on this bill, and the date on which my leader, the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis) spoke after the Easter recess. He was in the House for my speech on March 24—I presume he and his speechwriters have read it since—and he knows that that speech was one of opposition to this bill for the reasons I stated clearly at the time. At that point we considered that despite our opposition to the measure, we would let it go to committee in the hope that in committee we might be able to make the necessary improvements in it. However, the longer we studied the bill, the more we became aware of the obvious intent of the government to depart from the principle of universality wherever it could and the firmer became our conviction that at some point it was necessary to take a stand, that at some point it was necessary to say: You are going no further.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I do not mind telling you, Mr. Speaker, even though some of my hon. friends behind me may say I am revealing caucus secrets, that we had a struggle over the bill to amend the Old Age Security Act which the minister brought down in December, 1970. It confronted us with a dilemma. The bill did provide for some increase and for this reason we felt we ought to let it go through. But there were members of our caucus who argued that we should vote against it because it attacked the principle of universality.

• (1640)

On balance we let it go through, because although it attacked the principle of universality by increasing the guaranteed income supplement without increasing the basic amount—unless the minister still calls 42 cents an increase—nevertheless it was still true that there was universality at the \$80 level. In other words, all persons in Canada 65 years of age and over can qualify for and receive that amount of money.

The minister now comes along and introduces a bill that completely takes away the principle of universality from family allowances. We know that the minister is a member of a government that seems to think it has to tear down everything that has been built up during the past 50 years and remake it, and we are wondering what is next. Will this government take universality away from medicare, hospital insurance and what have you? We think that in our day we should be moving further in the direction of universality, not away from it, and this is why our party has decided that at some point we have to say no. I say to

the minister that this is that point. We are saying no, in our amendment, to second reading and we are going to say no by our vote on second reading itself.

As a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, I was planning to make a speech today before the minister spoke, but in different vein. It was going to be a speech in which I would appeal to the minister to take this bill back to the drawing board or back to the experts in his department who drew it for him and to do his best to come back here with a reasonable and sensible piece of legislation.

I still think that the minister is a man of some common sense. I remember in particular the way in which we were able to work together when he was a private member and even when he became a parliamentary secretary, particularly in the days of the Canada Pension Plan. There has been a bit of a gulf between us since he became a minister and has all the authority and the power that goes with that, but behind all that I think there is still something in the minister to which one might appeal.

Despite the speech that the minister made this afternoon, which seemed to be one of defending the proposition he has placed before us, I say to him—and the minister referred to this—as one who has been paying attention to income maintenance and social security measures for a long time that this bill is a serious mistake in Canadian social security legislation. Far from his worrying about any disavowal with which he charges us, I would say to him that he and the members of the cabinet to which he belongs, led by the present Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), are in fact disavowing a position that it has taken the Liberals 50 years to achieve.

Mr. Douglas: “No more of this free stuff”, says the Prime Minister.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Not only does he say that, but he says that it is a lot of guff for pensioners to be claiming that they are not getting enough to live on, and so on. Just as the government feels that every other area of government has to be torn apart and put together in some different way, they seem to think that King, St. Laurent, Pearson and the ministers that they had in their day were wrong to the extent that they moved gradually toward the concept of universality in social legislation.

Because this bill is not only opposed to what we have stood for across the years but is also opposed to what the Liberals themselves finally got around to putting on the statute books, we think that we are being true to ourselves, that we are doing a service to the Liberal party and most of all to the people of Canada, by taking a firm stand and saying that this bill in its present form ought not to pass.

I now want to say something about some of the comments made by the minister in his speech, on which I have commended him for its construction and the way he delivered it despite what I think of some of its contents. The minister rose in his seat only 20 feet away from me and said that we were voting against increasing allowances for the poor. I say nonsense, Mr. Speaker, we are not voting against increasing allowances for the poor. We want our people to get even greater allowances than the minister is proposing to assist them in the upbringing of their children. We are voting against the strings that the minister