

Government Orders

the Minister of Finance and which is going to cause great distress and financial hardship to many people in our society.

Part 1.2 of Clause 48 in Bill C-28 implements the clawback of family allowance and old age security pensions. The amount of the repayment is equal to 15 per cent of the taxpayer's income over \$50,000. That is what I wish to address.

In general, I think those of us who are concerned would recognize that with respect to family allowance this particular measure is going to take \$1.686 billion out of family budgets in the next five years, or \$500 million a year by 1991. It is true that certain family allowance benefits are taxable. Thirty per cent of family allowance benefits are already paid back to the government through the progressive income tax system.

Within ten years, close to one million Canadian families who currently receive family allowances or old age pensions will begin to lose these benefits due to the partial indexing that is inflation less 3 per cent of the \$50,000 threshold. So it is with great concern that I participate in this debate because it is an attack on children and families, as well as an attack on those who helped to build this country, the seniors of this land.

I want to speak in particular, and make my remarks on behalf of the people of the Mount Royal riding, as well as those in the rest of Canada. I have had the opportunity to speak to hundreds and hundreds in my riding. There is very serious concern. They feel that they are going to suffer directly as a result of this very negative, regressive legislation.

I would suggest to you that in fulfilling our responsibility as legislators we have to keep a careful eye on the government and its agenda, particularly in opposition. But I think that conscientious members of this government and of the legislature here should be speaking and expressing the concerns that are brought to their attention by their constituents, irrespective of party policy when it comes to matters as serious as this.

It is, therefore, ironic that after a weekend when the news was filled with the reviews of the Conservative agenda one year after the last election, today we are in the middle of a debate that symbolizes that agenda, one of the most serious attacks on social change and social policy in the history of the last 25 years.

I refer to the clawback of seniors' pensions, an erosion of the universality principle that has always guided our social programs in this country. The Conservative agenda appears aimed at cutting and reducing the caring aspects of government saying it is in the national interest. Where we differ on this side of the House is by believing in a more balanced approach to financial responsibility, always respecting the compassionate traditions upon which our country was founded.

Most people would agree that a government exists to make changes possible and to make things happen. However, Liberals do not believe in change for change sake but rather making things better. That is why a balance must be struck between the economic and social impact of change. We believe in this balanced approach. We believe that while it is the economy that grows, it is society that cares.

Throughout Canada's history, with all the changes brought in its short 120 years, there has always remained a deeply held conviction, a cornerstone of our national life that would never change, our tradition of universal access to social programs, Canada's way of demonstrating tolerance and fairness as members of a society. Yet, in 1984, that tradition began to unravel, to erode. It is this unravelling that I would like to address now.

Since coming to office the Conservatives have time after time, year after year, continued a slow, often deceptive, but always real plan, a plan to dismantle the safety net of social programs that most of us believed was part of the fabric of this country. Once it was everyone's right as a Canadian to have access to social programs, but that is no longer true. The social contract established decades ago gave every Canadian equal access to the benefits of our social programs. That is the contract that has been broken. There is not fairness and equal access.

• (1630)

Universality is quite a simple idea. It is the expression of a belief that over a lifetime every single Canadian contributes to the building and flourishing of this society in their own way and that no one should be shut out from the benefits of the country that they have helped to build. That is universality. It is simple, true, and Canadian. We must remember that this principle has survived governments of two political stripes and has survived recessions. Indeed, it grew out of the Depression. Yet this spirit and tradition of a government looking out for