

its financial support for essential social programs". This was said barely one month before this bill was introduced. The prediction and fear have happened already. First we allow the extending of the limit until the year 1994-95. It will only be a matter of time until it will be extended to the other provinces.

According to the estimate of this government, the three affected provinces were to lose \$2.135 billion over the 5-year period anticipated in this proposed bill. Perhaps at this time of year this government may mellow. Perhaps in the spirit of Christmas it will see a miracle and change its heart.

I would like to review the background of the Canada Assistance Plan.

At the time of Confederation, assistance to those in need, such as the ill, the aged, the disabled and those who felt the consequences of family break-ups and were suffering, was given by charitable organizations and charities, at the time mainly in rural areas.

The Fathers of Confederation gave the social assistance jurisdiction to the provinces. However, it became clear in the 1920s and 1930s that the Fathers of Confederation were wrong. The obligation to help the poor and those in need is truly a national one. Hence, the Canada Assistance Plan was born in 1966.

A year before that, a great Liberal, Mr. Lester B. Pearson, gave his vision of how to help those in need in the throne speech. That is the Liberal vision which this Tory government is trying to erase from the map of Canada.

The Canada Assistance Plan has two basic objectives: to eliminate poverty and, at the same time and even more important, to prevent and remove the causes of poverty.

Who benefits from the Canada Assistance Plan? In 1988-89, 1.85 million Canadians benefited from the Canada Assistance Plan, of whom some 40 per cent, over 780,000, were children. Not only that, but the volunteers in volunteer organizations who help these poor children feel that there is recognition of their work if the Canada Assistance Plan is in place.

This government is trying to take that away. What message are we sending to our volunteers in the coun-

try? The Canada Assistance Plan has been described as a social bond, as the cohesive glue that binds our country together. What a better glue at this time when the forces of disunity are threatening to disrupt our country.

Through this amendment the government is violating the spirit of Canadian nationhood. It is violating the sacred trust of Canada's social programs. If this government pursues this amendment Canada would take a great leap indeed, but a great leap backward.

Also, the Canada Assistance Plan, in addition to the Guaranteed Income Supplement for low income pensioners, is the only remaining national program that explicitly fights poverty. It is a program for poor and modest income families to access child care services in the provinces.

As long as we still do not have the national child care program which this government promised in 1988, which until now has not been implemented, at least there is an escape in the Canada Assistance Plan and an escape valve for children in need of child care spaces.

This government is even trying to plug this escape valve. Where is the soul of this government? Therefore, at Christmastime I say: "Please, open your hearts. Rescind this amendment".

In conclusion, I would like to repeat that the intention of this government to amend the Canada Assistance Act is a great step backwards. Canada would make a great step forward if this amendment were rescinded. I support the amendment of the member for Essex—Windsor.

• (1720)

This morning the subcommittee on poverty tabled its report and the Liberal caucus decided to issue a minority report. Why is that? It is because the majority report of the government members completely ignored the sense of urgency to help our poor Canadian children. It completely ignored the witnesses that we heard over one and a half years who would like to have measures introduced for food, clothing and shelter.

We recommend a series of proposals, such as the establishment of a national nutrition-based program for breakfast, lunch and snacks and to immediately restore the entrance requirements and duration of entitlement