

Resuming the debate on the motion of the Honourable Senator Kelly, seconded by the Honourable Senator Doyle, for the second reading of Bill C-32, An Act to amend the Canada Assistance Plan.

**Hon. Royce Frith (Leader of the Opposition):** Honourable senators, the government would love Canadians to believe that the legislation before us, Bill C-32, is "Robin Hood" legislation, a measure to take money from the great rich provinces of Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia and give it to the poor little Minister of Finance. That is what the government would love Canadians to believe. The reality is that the legislation before us today is a reverse Robin Hood measure; it is taking from the poor of the country. The government is moving to restrict the money available for the poorest of poor Canadians, the weakest of the weak, the most disadvantaged of the disadvantaged. The government is moving to take money from children living in poverty. The government is moving to end the recession by taking money from the victims of the recession. That is the reality.

The Minister of Finance makes it all sound very harmless when he talks about capping a cost-shared federal-provincial program. It all sounds like some innocent and necessary paper transaction, but it is not a simple paper transaction. The legislation will exact a cruel cost. Programs essential to allow all Canadians a modicum of dignity will be cut back. This government, which has attacked old age pensions, attacked family allowance payments, attacked unemployment insurance, attacked post-secondary education transfers, attacked medicare transfers, is now furthering the attack—

**Senator Bosa:** Housing.

**Senator Frith:** Yes. My colleague, Senator Bosa, adds housing to the infamous list.

—is furthering the attack on basic welfare programs. What is more, it is attacking at a time when our country is in a recession and when basic welfare services are most essential.

Before senators vote to support this legislation I urge them to consider exactly what the money from the Canada Assistance Plan is used for. It is used to provide social assistance to persons in need and welfare to persons in need. The Canada Assistance Plan provides money—this is what we are voting on: limiting a plan that provides money—for food, shelter, clothing and fuel for Canadians who otherwise would not have those commodities.

The Canada Assistance Plan provides items for the safety, well-being and rehabilitation of people in need. It provides wheelchairs and transportation for disabled Canadians. It is not, as I say, a simple paper transaction. The Canada Assistance Plan—continuing with what it is we are voting to limit today—is a plan that provides money for hostels for battered women and children. It provides money for homes for the aged. CAP provides money for foster homes and home support for families in emergency situations. It provides money for the protection of abused children and adoption services. That is what we are voting to limit. Those are the people who will be deprived when we stand up, if we do, and vote for this bill.

[Senator Lynch-Staunton,]

The Canada Assistance Plan is the source of federal aid for life skills training for the chronically unemployed and the source of federal money for the special needs of people at risk of being socially isolated, with particular emphasis on the physically and mentally disabled. That is not all. The Canada Assistance Plan provides money for counselling, case work, assessment and referral to help avoid family breakdown and subsequent long term dependence on public assistance. Through CAP the federal government provides money for critically needed dental, optical and nursing care for the poor.

[*Translation*]

Honourable senators, these are the services supported by the Canada Assistance Plan which will be cut back if this bill is passed.

International trade and macro-economic policy are not at issue here; rather it involves a program that supports the jobless, the elderly and the poor.

● (0950)

[*English*]

We are having a debate about whether or not Canadians have the right to be able to eat and have a bed at night. We are not talking about some bookkeeping transfer.

It is interesting to note that Senator Kelly, who spoke to the bill on February 18, could not bring himself to discuss the effects of Bill C-32 on these programs. Senator Kelly says that the bill is "relatively simple and straightforward"—all very simple and straightforward, perhaps, for the government; even simple and straightforward as a legislative act for us. But with what consequences? He sees it as simple and straightforward. He and the government he supports keep a lofty and safe distance from the people affected in order to see this legislation as a simple and straightforward paper transaction and not as it is, namely, a measure which will affect all Canadians who rely on social assistance simply to survive another day.

This bill will affect all Canadians who rely on the programs and services that are supported by the Canada Assistance Plan, only some of which I have just detailed.

I have an uneasy feeling that this government identifies with those in our society, privileged as they are, who see all government assistance as really "the dole". I do not believe that most Canadians feel that way. I think Canadians are proud of our country's social programs and want them maintained. I think Canadians believe very deeply, individually and personally in Medicare, old age pensions, family benefits, educational funding and unemployment insurance.

Those policies, built up by successive Liberal governments, are part of the framework of this country; they are part of the fabric of this country. We have seen that framework dismantled gradually by this government and that fabric unravelled.

I fear that too many Conservatives forget the history of the Canada Assistance Plan and need to be reminded of the words of our colleague, Senator MacEachen. On April 4, 1966, he introduced Bill C-207 and as the then minister of National Health and Welfare, he rose in his place in the House of Commons, and this is reported at page 6360 of the *House of*