

Government Orders

I reiterate that this happens in every corner of this country. It happens to women in tenements. It happens to women in mansions. It happens to women from coast to coast to coast. It is not something that we should be prepared to slough off or gloss over lightly. It is an important and frightening aspect of what this bill can do to worsen a situation for women who are already in desperate circumstance.

I know very well that the hon. minister is a compassionate man. I have heard him on many occasions. I know he cares about things like this, but I suggest that the government in its planning did not think of this aspect of what this bill can do.

I agree with my colleague from Kingston and the Islands; I very much wish that the Senate had sent back even tougher amendments. However I think the amendments that it has sent are eminently reasonable. I do not understand why the government sees fit to speak against them. What the Senate is effectively saying, if I may be so bold as to interpret it, is that this clawback should be indexed in such a way that within 10 years the level of clawback will not go to an income that is worth effectively \$35,000 in today's dollars. By the way, may I add that I am delighted to hear the change of heart by my colleagues in the New Democratic Party with regard to the other place. Every year under the current legislation more and more people are going to fall into this trap, more and more people are going to be facing real hardship.

Everybody in this House who grew up since the inception of the family allowance has stories to tell as to what the money was used for. I recall as the only child of a widowed mother that the family allowance cheques which came to my mother for me were used to pay for insurance benefits.

I recall other friends whose parents in the pre-medicare days used the family allowance to pay for things such as glasses and shoes in many cases. That money that came in, even back in the days when it was \$6 a month or \$8 a month, made a real difference to families who were not considered to be poverty level. They were considered to be ordinary middle-class Canadian families. At \$50,000 a year that is what we are talking about in 1990.

In the year 2000, if this bill keeps on, where do you think the poverty line will be, Madam Speaker? I suggest that it will be a lot closer to \$35,000 than it will be to \$50,000 today.

Let us look at the reasons that social programs were put into place. They were put into place because of the spirit that is Canada, because of the *raison d'être* of this country.

Most of us in the House, with the exception of perhaps my colleague from Nunatsiak, my colleague from the Western Arctic and another colleague from Alberta who is not here, came here through our parents, our grandparents, our ancestors, to live a better life. That is why we came here. Whether we came from eastern Europe, western Europe, from France, the British Isles, that is why we or our ancestors came to this country. We came because we wanted to see a system of government that was fair, equal and democratic.

We also knew that not everybody, in spite of the opportunities that Canada offers, can take full advantage of those opportunities. There are some people so caught in the cycle of poverty that without massive assistance they cannot break out. There are some people because of other socio-economic difficulties who cannot realize their full potential.

Consequently that was the reason in the dirty thirties the government of this country said that we needed social programs to assist, that we needed to ensure the elderly and families had something to help them along.

It was not considered—and certainly it has not been in my lifetime—a temporary measure to be thrown away because of economic exigencies in other areas of government delivery of services. That is the way, sadly, this government is treating social programs today.

The Prime Minister referred to universality as a sacred trust. It is a sad day for Canada that the words sacred trust have become base coinage.

The people of this country have a right to believe that the things they helped fight for, that they contributed to through their tax dollars, and that they contributed to through their building of this country would be there for them and for their children. The trust, sacred or otherwise, has been broken.