

The new system, like the current one, will be partially de-indexed, which means that the values of these benefits will decline over time. That is true not only of the benefits, but also of the magic threshold up to which the maximum benefits are paid, which will be \$25,921 in 1993; thus, the threshold also will be de-indexed.

The government response to this criticism is that the best protection against inflation is a commitment to price stability through both social policy and economic policy, and that the government's record in this matter is a good one because it has increased and enriched benefits since 1985 so that the average level of benefits paid to low income families has more than kept pace with inflation.

The earned income supplement has also raised questions on issues of equity. Although working families need more help, it has been suggested that this is not the way to help them. Some families who are poor will get additional benefits while other families who are poor will not.

However, other social analysts have pointed out that, within social assistance programs delivered by provincial governments, a number of benefits in kind are provided to recipients—such as coverage for dental care, for prescription drugs and for eyeglasses, as examples—that are not available to the working poor. This was a point made by Mr. Patrick Johnson. The earned income supplement is a way to try to rectify that imbalance between the working poor and the socially assisted.

There are other troubling issues raised concerning equity. Canada, it is said, apparently has one of the world's highest rates of poverty for single-parent and female-led single-parent families—the most recent rate being 60 per cent. How many of these will receive the full \$500 supplement? Also, since this is a child benefit package, the earned income supplement is restricted in this instance to families with children. What about families with no children? It is claimed that approximately 60 per cent of the working poor are in households with no children; 60 per cent would not be able to benefit from the earned income supplement as it is proposed.

So the question is, what would be the impact of the earned income supplement on the poverty rate? For example, how many poor single families would be boosted above the poverty line? I would hope that the committee studying this legislation might address these issues.

The most important consideration to keep in mind, in my view, is the impact of child benefits on poverty, on poor children in Canada, of whom we know there are far too many, as our own Senate committee has found.

I share the concern of those who claim that the new child tax benefit, while a positive step forward, is not a comprehensive program to combat child poverty. We must do better, and I hope that the committee that will study this bill will review some of the issues raised by those citizens and social groups appearing before the House of Commons committee for future

changes to the child benefits package so that the rhetoric surrounding the signing of the Convention on Children's Rights and the declarations of those in the political process are implemented into legislation.

The fight against poverty is not just a matter of child benefits. A national child care program is a vital element in that battle. I would hope that that goal has not been abandoned and that Canada will have such a program in the near future.

In its review of this legislation, the Senate committee may wish to revisit this issue, which was the subject of a report by a subcommittee on child care which I had the privilege of chairing some time ago. That was a subcommittee of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

Honourable senators, this legislation should be supported as an evolution in the history of child benefits, a positive step forward but not the "end of history", to paraphrase Fukiyama. We should indeed strive for continued progressive changes to child benefit programs in order to serve the needs of children and their families in Canada.

[Translation]

Hon. Jacques Hébert: Honourable senators, I would like to be able to say that it is a pleasure to speak in this debate. Unfortunately, it is not. How could I rejoice in the death of the universal family allowance program?

Bill C-80, which is even more odious in that it is being proposed in the midst of a recession, will remove another pillar from the Canadian social security system. When it is passed, a large chunk of the social safety net that Canadians have laboriously constructed since the 1940s will be gone.

This measure is even more unacceptable in that it is contrary not only to the evolution of social programs in Canada but to the formal assurances that the Prime Minister and his government gave us. In its Speech from the Throne on November 5, 1984, the newly elected government said that it has as a high priority measures to support and strengthen the Canadian family, which is the cornerstone of our society.

How nice!

In the same vein, the Minister of National Health and Welfare said on November 15, 1984:

It is my role to put forward signals and initiatives which will strengthen the role of the family and give it more prominence in society than I feel it has been given before.

Could anyone say it better?

Several years later, this same Conservative government, in the Speech from the Throne on May 13, 1991, admitted that children are both the most important and the most vulnerable members of society and that its objective was to provide better education and better protection for Canadian children. That is almost sublime!