

Family Allowances Act

An Hon. Member: That's what they were saying.

Mr. Oberle: What we have to look at is the fact that we have accumulated over the last 15 years of Liberal socialism a debt of \$190 billion. Over the last three years the current account deficit grew by 25 per cent a year. The problem with universality is that if it is continued in the same fashion as it has been, particularly over the last three years, not only will family allowances be threatened but so will the unemployment insurance fund, old age pensions and everything else. The only real way we have to guarantee and to enhance these social programs is to make sure that the economy on which we rely to pay for these programs is healthy and is restored to its former dynamism and health.

How is that done? When things get tough, those who are in greatest need are helped, and that is what this Bill attempts to do.

I look at these social programs in two ways. The unemployment insurance fund and the Canada Pension Plan are programs to which people contribute during their working lives and which will help them when they are in need, that is when they lose their jobs, have to make a transition from one job to another or when they reach old age. We pride ourselves with having one of the most advanced social programs in the world. That, of course, is a myth but it is only a myth because it is in its starting phase. I compare social programs with those of some of the European countries. Bismarck started the old age pensions program in Germany in 1871. The program, which is much more generous than what we have presently and what we hope to have once the Canada Pension Plan becomes mature, has survived two major depressions and two world wars, and people are infinitely better off in their retirement years than they were during their working years. That is, I suppose, responsible management.

We began thinking about pension plans in the Diefenbaker years, but it was not until 1965 that we started the Canada Pension Plan. It will take until the year 2005 or 2010 before that particular program has reached its full value and maturity. In other words, people have contributed to it all their working lives and should therefore be entitled to adequate income in their retirement years. Thus, we have to do something in the meantime, which is where the old age pensions and the guaranteed income supplements come into the picture.

● (1150)

No one has contributed to the guaranteed income supplement or to the old age pension programs. That comes directly from general revenue—

Mr. Benjamin: What about the taxpayers?

Mr. Oberle: The taxpayers contribute, of course; but they have not contributed directly. Nor is the old age pension program universal, since there is the basic old age pension and then there are the income supplements which are designed to help those who are in the greatest need. No one argues with any of these measures. All we are saying is that at this time

the country is in such precarious circumstances that we have to ensure that the scarce public resources which are available are put to the best use. This is what the Bill before us proposes to do.

My hon. friend from Spadina said he has ten grandchildren. I have four myself. I suggest that the Hon. Member for Spadina (Mr. Heap) is in a better position than most to help his children and his grandchildren with respect to obtaining a proper education. The problem which the NDP and the Liberals face presently is that they are not so much concerned with helping the needy, which is our main concern. Their concern is with helping the greedy.

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Ms. Mitchell: You are reducing it for the needy. What about the banks and the oil companies, are they not pretty greedy?

Mr. Oberle: I note the reactions to my comments of a particular Hon. Member opposite.

Mr. Hovdebo: Helping the greedy, that is the basic policy of the Conservatives.

Mr. Oberle: The Hon. Member opposite to whom I refer lives in a social housing project in Ottawa because projects of this type are supposed to be universal. There is not supposed to be a stigma attached to being poor. Therefore, everyone, regardless of income, whether it is \$100,000 a year or \$23,000 a year, should be entitled to these social, non-contributory social programs. However, we know that that is not possible. We know that that will not be possible, particularly in the foreseeable future. We know that it will be necessary for us to bring about measures which will help those in the greatest need to continue to receive these social benefits and to make every effort to see that those in greatest need have these benefits enhanced for them. However, that will have to come about at the expense of those in the higher income brackets, such as the Hon. Member opposite whose income is not great but who can educate his children and look after himself in his old age, particularly with the generous benefits Members of Parliament have. I note my time is up, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, the amendment with respect to a six-month hoist is not nearly long enough when a Bill such as the one before us is concerned. I appreciate that if there were a last minute conversion on the government side and it decided to support the amendment, the Bill would die on the Order Paper. Although, knowing the Conservatives, I think they would probably bring it back in again at a later date.

Since the establishment of the first social programs in this country, the attacks on them have started the very next day. That has been the history of social programs in our country. It does not matter at all whether we are speaking of old age pensions, medicare, hospitalization, unemployment insurance or worker's compensation. There are those in our society, usually the well-to-do, the organized and the powerful, who