

Government Orders

I have no objection to a mixed economy, Mr. Speaker, because it is part of our system. We are used to that. However, we have a government obsessed by deregulation, free trade and taxation. Remember, we have had at least 32 tax increases from this government since it came to power in 1984. What I find truly appalling, Mr. Speaker, is the fact that so far in this debate on third reading, only one member rose on behalf of government, a minister who spoke for 17 minutes, and that was it. Not a single government member rose to justify the decision made by their government, their political leaders who today are supported by only 10 to 12 per cent of Canadians. And now, without a national debate, without a parliamentary debate, on third reading the Conservative members will rise and vote, that I am sure, to support the government's proposal. That is the kind of silence I do not understand. It is a shameful silence! I urge Conservative members to rise in the House and say why they support this legislation on third reading.

Mr. Speaker, this worries me because I feel, in fact I know, that after what happened in Montreal on the weekend, the debate on social programs will be led by the experts, and this is the government's first initiative. It will impose on Canadians a decision made by 10 to 12 per cent of the population, a decision that will have a dramatic and even terrifying impact on the quality of life of many Canadians.

[*English*]

Who does the Canada Assistance Plan help provinces provide assistance and services for? The needy, Mr. Speaker. The CAP makes it possible for those in foster homes to survive, for abused children to get some care, understanding and help.

The CAP helps women in my riding with children, in homes that are called shelters for abused women. I have several in my riding. It is not easy. The people in there are having a hard time, but the CAP program is there to assist. It assists those people who need training programs. It provides essential living services for disabled persons.

In other words, CAP, Canada Assistance Plan, helps those in need. It is a safety net of the last resort which aids close to two million low income Canadians, our poorest citizens. We all know we have close to 1,400,000 unemployed Canadians today in Canada. That is a shame, but we also have 2,200,000 Canadians on social assistance and that is a shame for this country.

What do we do because we care? We put together a safety net. The Canada Assistance Plan is part of that safety net. This government, by the decision of a very few, is cutting the required resources which the poor people of Canada need.

People will argue that the rich provinces of Ontario, B.C. and Alberta, where equalization payments are not paid, should not be getting as much.

I will tell you that in my riding, the poor are poor. If we say the poor people in Ontario, B.C. or Alberta are not entitled to our preoccupations in terms of helping them, we are indeed in a sad state. We are indeed, as my friend today said, in a society with a warped approach to obligations.

I represent the riding of Ottawa—Vanier, and for those of you who do not know, it is not the richest. It has the lowest family income in the national capital region, but we are not ashamed of the fact that we work hard.

• (1740)

We do not have the high income groups because we did not have the systems in place years ago. I could give a whole historical background as to why poverty in my riding was systemic, why people would continue to live in sometimes low-income and sometimes poor conditions. I was brought up in that milieu. I got out of it basically because there was an understanding in this country of helping people who wanted to help themselves.

In Ontario this year alone a cap on CAP, the Canada Assistance Plan, will cost us \$1 billion. Half of Canada's poorest people live in my province of Ontario, in British Columbia and in Alberta—half of them. In effect through Bill C-32 the Tory government is abdicating its responsibility to provide assistance to the poorest Canadians. It is transferring that responsibility to provinces and municipalities that must struggle to find ways to make up for their budget short-falls without jeopardizing their programs.

They had nothing to do with creating this made-in-Canada recession which was created and planned by this government following the free trade deal it made with the Americans. It was a set pattern put in place by people who knew what they were doing. We started being in a recession way before the Americans and we will probably get out of it way after they do.