

The Address—Ms. Mitchell

I am not against some reforms. However, I want to stress over and over again that we believe the basic universal family allowance program is the most important program. As I said earlier, it recognizes the middle income earners. I can tell the new Government that if it is going to take away all benefits from that group, then politically it will be in real hot water. That is a little bit of advice.

Mr. Oberle: Mr. Speaker, I always listen very intently and with great interest to any of these discussions, and to the speakers from the New Democratic Party on this critical question. I wish to ask the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) whether she realizes that a lot of the inequities in the welfare and social contract system have to do with the fact that Canadians are sometimes deprived because of where they live. Poor people living in isolated areas of the country, for example on remote Indian reserves, are suffering because of the universality system.

The Department of Indian Affairs has a statutory requirement not to make any welfare payments that would exceed those paid in the provinces. I always like people who haven't any children lecturing me, one who has four children, or people who have never run a business telling me how to run my business. Has the Hon. Member not realized that it is because of the universality, because of the very nature of the system, that poor people are being deprived?

The Hon. Member says that higher income Canadians should pay more. I would like to pay more, but I would like to know that it will get to the right place. My ability to pay more is limited by the fact that I am already paying for something that the Government wants to give me back. Rather than paying more, I would like to have the choice of saying "Don't pay me my old age pension and don't pay me my family allowance." I will gladly contribute because nobody has a monopoly on a social conscience. However, we want to know that what we are giving goes to the right place, that it is not skimmed away by some bureaucracy, or whatever.

I would like the Hon. Member, who comes from British Columbia, to tell me what the solution would be for my people in Fort Ware, for instance, where the cost of living is four times what it is in Vancouver, or in some of the isolated communities up and down the coast.

The old age pension cheque is the same because it is universal. The family allowance cheque is the same because it is universal. By the 12th or 15th of the month, these people go hungry. I am not overstating that. We have malnutrition and starvation on some of these Indian reserves because of the universality of the system. That is a problem. How do you overcome that?

Ms. Mitchell: Mr. Speaker, I agree completely with the Hon. Member that people in remote areas, and particularly those on Indian reserves, are suffering desperately from poverty. This certainly must be a very major concern. What I think the Hon. Member is doing is confusing the concept of universal family allowances or old age pensions with basic social assistance programs.

Mr. Oberle: It is the same thing.

Ms. Mitchell: No, it is not the same thing. The basic social assistance plan is administered under the Canada Assistance Plan. It is 50 per cent provincial and 50 per cent federal responsibility. In the case of native people, there is a special federal responsibility for those on reserves. It is a basic raising of those rates and some adjustment for remote areas that is required.

In some cities, the cost of housing is much higher than in others. There should be an adjustment for a more flexible housing allowance. That is where the solution has to come from in order to meet the basic needs for food and shelter for these people.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: We shall now resume debate.

● (1600)

Mr. Bob Pennock (Etobicoke North): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, and the Hon. Member for Don Valley West (Mr. Bosley) on your appointments, and to express my personal confidence in you and your office. I would also like to congratulate the Hon. Member for Sarnia-Lambton (Mr. James) and the Hon. Member for Montreal-Mercier (Ms. Jacques), the mover and seconder respectively of the address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. In particular, I would like to commend them for their eloquent and sincere addresses.

As a new Member of Parliament, I am sure that I can speak on behalf of all new Members in thanking the veteran Members of Parliament on both sides of the House for the assistance they have provided us in these first few weeks. I know many of my colleagues would agree that the sheer volume of information that has been thrust upon us has made us feel much like we are trying to paddle a canoe up a waterfall without a paddle.

Having the opportunity to present my maiden speech in the House so early in my parliamentary career is both difficult and exhilarating. The institution of Parliament is steeped in history. However, it was not until the division bells rang and I walked through the curtains behind me into the House for the first time that I realized the gravity of my new responsibility fully. For me personally, it was a time for deep reflection.

On September 4, our Party was given a mandate for change; not just a change in Government but a change in the nature of the relationship between Government and the people. I am deeply honoured to be part of the new Government and to meet this new challenge.

I represent the Riding of Etobicoke North which is geographically situated in the Northwest corner of Metropolitan Toronto. I am proud of the fact that I am the first local resident of my community ever to represent our riding in the House of Commons. I have lived in the riding for 26 years. It is where I have made my home, founded my business and raised my children.