

lem in life. It is not the type of selective program that tells the people concerned that they will receive more favourable treatment than other groups in society. Under the terms and benefits of this act, blind people today are in a selective unfavourable position. It is a disgrace that we in Canada have been so niggardly in our assistance to the blind people in this country. I hope the federal government will take some initiative to improve the level of assistance provided to this group of people.

I also note that the Canada Assistance Plan is to be extended another five years. There are many worthwhile features in the Canada Assistance Plan in terms of the federal government's contribution to this program. There are deficiencies as well. I wish to make just one comment in this regard. That is to take note of the recent growth of unfavourable comment in Canada about welfare programs in general. There seems to be a mood and feeling developing in Canada that there are many thousands of bums, people who are too lazy to go out and work and so on. They feel they are simply getting along on the Canada Assistance Plan benefits and that the whole program is a shambles. I suggest we all have to recognize that some problems do exist. We all recognize that there are new life styles and new life patterns developing in Canada. These are producing problems which have not been totally taken into account in the programs as they have been developed in this area to date.

• (1210)

But if we concentrate our attention in this area without reference to those who have a justifiable claim to assistance we are doing a disservice to many thousands who are in dire need. A good case could be made out for a better deal for many who are presently existing on welfare benefits under the Canada Assistance Plan and various provincial plans. We need to keep in mind our responsibility as a nation to help those who are not able to help themselves adequately. It may be we are devoting insufficient attention to the requirements of many thousands who are living in unfortunate circumstances and who have a justifiable claim for assistance under these programs.

The government and its officials will feel a justifiable sense of accomplishment with respect to the bill now before us. There are useful items in it. Some progress has been made in implementing the principle of equalization though much work remains to be done. I certainly hope we shall see more progress in the coming months in dealing with some of the shortcomings which have been pointed out in the course of this debate.

Mr. Paul St. Pierre (Parliamentary Secretary to Secretary of State for External Affairs): Mr. Speaker, this is not the type of speech I prefer to make in this House or anywhere else for that matter. I intend to deal with some of the less lovely aspects of political life. I am dealing with the subject of irresponsible statements made by some British Columbia politicians who are in a position to know better and who are, to put it plainly, making pronouncements aimed at showing that French-speaking Canadians are being favoured by the present federal government.

Before going further, I should like to say that the remarks I intend to make are not directed against members of the British Columbia Legislative Assembly whose

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ridings are in my federal constituency of Coast-Chilcotin, namely, Alex Fraser of the Social Credit party, the member for Cariboo; the Hon. Isabel Dawson, Minister without Portfolio, the member for Mackenzie; Bill Hartley of the NDP, the member for Yale-Lillooet, or Alan Williamson of the Liberal party, the member for West Vancouver. I am personally acquainted with these four people and I know that the type of campaign of which I am speaking would be beneath their dignity. As for some of the other members of the British Columbia Social Credit party, if the cap fits, let them wear it. But they should not think that because some of their wild statements are not always promptly rebutted here they have gone unnoticed. They are not unnoticed. There are letters. There are meetings arranged but never held. There are public statements. And they are on the record.

In this bill we are dealing with an idea which is fundamental to a federal state. Nothing could be more so. No nation can exist without brotherhood, without sharing and without recognition of the basic principle that the poorer sections of the nation shall be helped by those which are wealthier. There is nothing unfamiliar about that idea, whether we look to Yugoslavia or Switzerland or to a score of other states. And the complaints which arise in connection with redistribution are familiar enough, also.

I had the privilege during the recess of sitting in the famous mother of parliaments in Westminster. On the day I happened to be there, the British minister of trade and commerce was being questioned by the opposition and by members of his own party on his policies. The subject turned to special incentive grants to slow growth areas of Britain, and the familiar complaints were heard. Why is one particular area of Scotland receiving aid while certain areas of Wales or the Midlands are not? The old questions and the old problems. We in this federal parliament are engaged in trying to make some redistribution of the tax dollars of all Canadians in the name of a greater Canada. Skillfully or otherwise, this is what we are attempting to do. I am one who has some doubts about the ways in which federal governments, both this one and its many predecessors, have sought to redistribute the wealth. Also, as a westerner, I have some quarrels with the east. There are many of us at home who have no deep and abiding affection for the Canadian banking system, controlled, as it is, by eastern Canada—surely one of the most conservative and unimaginative banking systems of any vigorous young nation. We do not particularly appreciate the control of many of our companies by boards of directors selected from the east all of whom appear to have snow-white hair and ideas which are very old.

British Columbia is producing some of the wealth which is available for redistribution to the poorer provinces. This is being created back home by people with imagination, drive and energy and we sometimes feel we are doing it in spite of the eastern Canadian majority vote in this federation. But that is not the main burden of my remarks today. The fact remains that some redistribution of wealth is fundamental to the very existence of Canada. Indeed, the principle applies even within provinces. In the Province of British Columbia wealth tends to concentrate in the City of Vancouver. Provincial governments over the