

by a Progressive Conservative Government, become a clear and present danger to the integrity of our social programs?

I must conclude, Mr. Speaker, that the real fear of the opposition Parties is not, in the words of the Right Hon. Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Turner), that we will "dismantle" these social programs, but that we will make them more rational and equitable.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** It is for the Party's political purposes that it wants to foster the false assumption that any change to the status quo will erode these systems and threaten the principle of universality. Why? It is not because the existing systems are perfect. Hon. Members opposite know, and we know, that many elements of these systems are in fact regressive. The child tax exemption, the age exemption, and the pension income deduction, increase their benefits as family income rises. Many groups and individuals whose commitment to progressive social policy cannot be questioned, such as the Canadian Council on Social Development, the National Council of Welfare and the National Advisory Council on the Status of Women, have all pointed out for many years these and other anomalies and inequities in the system, and have called for their reform.

The truth is, Mr. Speaker, that the opposition Parties are willing to keep these perverse features of the status quo undisturbed if that is the price of preventing a Progressive Conservative Government from demonstrating that it, too, can implement progressive social reforms. What the opposition Parties want to preserve is not universality but the false image of our Party as the enemy of the poor and the disadvantaged. That is their political goal and that is dishonest.

I am pleased that this debate is taking place in the House today, that once and for all, while the opposition Parties might not agree, at least the Canadian people, who I know have the sensibility to understand, will know that yes, Progressive Conservative Party members also have families who will grow old. They also get ill. We also have compassion. We also are led by those ideals. I hope for once Hon. Members opposite will be quiet and not say that it is only they who understand people, only they who understand compassion and have a heart. We do, too.

● (1410)

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms. Copps:** I think we touched a nerve.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** Yes, you did, because it was a dishonest approach you were taking.

**Mr. McKenzie:** As phony as a \$3 bill.

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** In doing so, Mr. Speaker, they have themselves become prisoners of the status quo and the enemy of free debate on these programs. They have locked themselves into a posture where they are, in effect, saying that before the

### *Borrowing Authority*

Government even begins to consult with the Canadian public on these programs it must either promise not to change them at all or it must tell them in advance precisely what action it will take to change those programs, what persons will benefit and who will bear the burden.

I saw that demonstrated today by the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) when she said: "Forget about consultation, forget about speaking to the people or the provincial Governments; just do it". That is not the way we will approach it. If any evidence was needed that this review was necessary and that consultation was valid, that to ask the Canadian people was purposeful, I saw it demonstrated today in Question Period when she said that we do not need to consult, that we should just get on with it.

The absurdity of these demands, considered in the cold light of day, is obvious, Mr. Speaker. It is legitimate for the Opposition to ask on what principles these reviews will be carried out. We have stated these principles and I want to state them very clearly again. First, all savings generated from any changes will be redistributed to social programs and will not be applied to deficit reduction. Secondly, there will be no income test before family allowances or old age pensions are paid, and benefits from old age pensions will be taxed no differently from any other form of income.

To go beyond this is to designate preferences for particular mechanisms of living up to these principles which would be to foreclose legitimate debate on these programs and their relation to the tax system. We believe that the advice of the Canadian people can help us devise better methods of implementing these principles than those we would have been able to devise without that advice. I realize this might be a difficult approach to grasp for Members opposite, that a Government would not rush blindly into changing basic social programs without seeking public input. But it is an approach to which this Government is committed and which it will follow.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** For example, we do not agree with the Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Broadbent) that any surtax on family allowances, no matter what rate is applied or at what level, is an idea that is not legitimately open for discussion. What we are saying to the Opposition is simply this. Let us have a reasonable debate. Put your points forward clearly. Express them forcefully. But do not put behind motives on which you have been elected for so long, trying to create fear and to say that somehow you have a corner on the concept of compassion. Do not attempt to use as legitimate political action the idea that by creating fear you can somehow get re-elected. I do not believe that that is a legitimate approach.

**Some Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Epp (Provencher):** For example, the Leader of the Opposition said today that a program directed to the poor is a poor program. Hon. Members nod their heads. I ask them: The guaranteed income supplement program is paid to whom?