

Family Allowances Act, 1973

I want to conclude my remarks today by suggesting that it will be very interesting to see if there are Members opposite who have the courage and the compassion for young children in Canada who will stay out of the House or perhaps even vote against the Bill when we do so later today. If those Members opposite stand in their place to vote against the Bill, they will be telling the people of Canada that the Government is taking a step today which will result in less money being sent to the mothers and children of Canada. If those Members who vote in favour want that on their conscience, so be it. I will guarantee that we in the NDP will be voting to delay this Bill for six months, as the proposed amendment suggests.

We will be opposing this Bill because we will never vote for a measure that takes money out of the hands of children. Children are the human resource of this country and we are very proud of them. We will vote against any measure which begins to erode this right.

Mr. David Orlikow (Winnipeg North): Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am surprised that we have not had from some of the Government backbenchers an explanation of why they are prepared to support this Bill. These measures represent a change in the philosophy of this Government about which we have known of for a long time. These Bills which propose to cap Old Age Security benefits, retired public servant pensions and Family Allowance payments to 6 and 5 per cent are just another example to demonstrate that when times get tough the first thing which the Liberals consider expendable is their supposed commitment to social programs.

We have seen decreasing support for medicare, hospital insurance and other basic safety net programs which were developed in this country over the last 30 years. It is interesting to see our friends in the Conservative benches expressing their opposition to this proposal as well as to the proposals concerning old age pensions. The fact is that when they voted for the 6 per cent and 5 per cent limits on increases to public service wages, they were voting for these measures as well. They are attempting to be on both sides of the fence when they oppose these Bills.

We are witnessing the Government taking deliberate steps during these difficult economic times to scale down the social programs which have been built up over so many years in this country. The Government has introduced measures to cap the indexing of Family Allowances and pensions even though the six and five limits to these increases over the next two years will mean a reduction in the standard of living of old age pensioners and families who receive Family Allowance.

There is no question that the increase in next year's cost of living will be much closer to 9 per cent than the 6 per cent figure which was projected by the Government last June. Furthermore, it will not even be close to the 5 per cent cap which has been proposed by the Government for the following year. At the same time as these cutbacks are being implemented, the reduced revenues of the federal and provincial Governments have resulted in their implementing methods to cut back

on coverage in such areas as medical and hospital insurance which Canadians have come to expect. The federal Government is forcing the Provinces to cut back the support in certain areas which they give to hospital and medical insurance programs as a result of the reduction in its contributions to the Provinces for those programs.

Therefore, we have seen a decrease in the number of hospital beds in use in almost every city in Canada. We are seeing more doctors opting out of medical insurance plans because the Provinces will not agree to give the doctors the kind of increases they feel they need. We will see a gradual reduction in the standard of service. Indeed, some people who pioneered the health insurance scheme, such as the Hon. Mr. Douglas, the former Premier of Saskatchewan under whose leadership hospital and medical insurance was implemented for the first time in any Province, and Justice Hall, are predicting that if this trend continues we will have a two-track medical system in a few years. People who have the wherewithal to pay the extras which doctors and hospitals will demand will get first-class coverage, while people who cannot afford that will get second-class coverage.

● (1430)

This proposal to cap Family Allowances strikes a blow at the welfare of almost all the families with children in this country. Given the cost of living at the present time and the cost of housing, the very high percentage of a family's income which is needed to pay the kind of mortgage payments required for anything more than the modest home, it is unusual when both a husband and wife are not working these days. That means extra expenses in the way of child care and other family expenses. Very few families do not need the kind of assistance which they have been getting through Family Allowance. We are not alone in that kind of assessment. Yesterday an editorial in *The Globe and Mail* was entitled "The Society's Charges". Let me put a couple of sentences from that editorial on the record. The editorial begins:

The effects of a weakened economy are being written ominously into the case books of Children's Aid Society workers in Ontario. More and more parents are finding that the squeeze on their budgets is so tight that they cannot afford to keep their children at home. They are turning to the CAS for help in numbers described as "alarming".

"Poverty is back on our doorsteps and some parents just don't have the wherewithal to care for their children", said George Caldwell, executive director of the Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies.

The editorial goes on to say that record numbers of teenagers are moving away from home and applying for welfare, partly because their parents say they do not have the money to care for them.

Given that that is the situation and the reality, this is the time when the Government proposes to cut back on the Family Allowances received by Canadian families. The United