

Family Allowances Act, 1973

We heard also from labour union groups. The message was the same. The labour unions called these three Bills perverse, perverse in the sense that they would accomplish the opposite of what was needed in this country at this time.

On this piece of legislation we heard from a group from Ottawa who have joined together in a poverty group. They came as witnesses before Government and Members of Parliament on behalf of Canadians who live below the poverty line. Their message was very clear: "Don't pass this piece of legislation".

It is wise for Members to be reminded, and those who were not in Committee may not have heard about it, that the poverty group told us that they had put in place in the City of Ottawa a transportation system, cars and buses, to take those on low income, those below the poverty line, to known grocery stores in the City of Ottawa in order that they can get groceries for their children at the lowest possible price. They stated that if they put that transportation system in place the day before the Family Allowance cheque arrived, they would not have any customers. They very deliberately put that transportation system in place for the day after the Family Allowance cheques arrive. That is the point at which single mothers and low-income earners have cash in their hands and can go to a grocery store and buy the kind of nutritious food which their children need to have an equal chance of growing up healthy, of being able to have the energy to participate in school activities, to study and to succeed.

● (1140)

For the Minister to stand in the House and say: "I am the defender of children, and it is my decision and that of the Liberal Party of Canada to take some money out of those monthly cheques", which are used to buy food, and to lump it into a sum which occurs one time only, an extra \$50 one-time only, not paid every year for the next 50 years, and then to say: "We have done nothing to hurt the poverty-stricken people in this country", is pure, unadulterated nonsense. When one is discussing a reduction of \$1.40 a month, for a mother with two children it amounts to \$2.80 a month, and that is a big start on providing transportation or a bus pass. That amount buys a lot of macaroni and cheese or provides three or four litres of milk a month. If a mother has four children, it means the loss of \$5.60, which will buy even more. Throughout the lifetime of those children, whatever age they are today, until they reach the age of 18 this piece of legislation will affect their parents' income and ability to buy milk, bread and other food.

This is the third time in six years that the Government has done this. It did it in 1976, in 1978 and now in 1983. We have a policy shift which is significant, important and not well understood. We get nothing but bafflelegab from the Minister of National Health and Welfare. She is taking family policies, support for children, and she is saying: "I do not want to have very much to do with them as Minister of National Health and Welfare; I prefer the Finance Minister to be the champion of children in this country".

In my time in this House I have watched Liberal cabinets form and reform, and I have yet to see a Minister of Finance that I would want in charge of family policy in this country. I have yet to see an economic committee that I would want to see in charge of family policy. The proper place for it is in the portfolio of the Minister of National Health and Welfare and in Standing Committee on National Health and Welfare. We are abrogating our responsibility to Canadian children and families if we lend our vote and our voices to the transfer of that responsibility from the Department of National Health and Welfare to the Department of Finance. All one must do is review Canadian history and the record of Ministers of Finance in this country. Ministers of Finance do a very important job and have a very important responsibility, but they will not have the time to give the attention to the development of family policy that it deserves.

We have one day left in which to debate this legislation. This very day is the last opportunity for Members of the Liberal Party who have a social conscience, who believe in social justice, to stand in this Chamber and tell their Cabinet that it is on the wrong path and that, in a time of economic difficulty, one does not attack people who live at or near the poverty line. We have done this twice in the last two weeks. Liberal Members have stood in this House and made life more difficult for the pensioners of Canada. Last Thursday evening, one week ago, Liberal Members stood in this House and said that all senior citizens who make \$750 a month or more will have their incomes cut. On Monday of this week, they wanted to pay one man, Donald Macdonald, \$800 a day, yet they want to cut income from every pensioner who makes \$750 a month. That is a perversion of what this place and this country is all about.

Before I resume my seat, I will move a motion, a procedural motion, which, simply stated, proposes that this piece of legislation be considered six months from now rather than today. It is called a six month hoist and effectively makes a public statement without causing a Government to collapse or causing a general election. It is simply a means whereby people of conscience in this Chamber can stand up and send the message to the Cabinet that they do not applaud this piece of legislation, that they do not agree with the direction it has taken. I encourage Members of the Liberal Party to stand up and support that motion.

What I would prefer is that Members of the Liberal Party stand up during the vote at third reading stage and turn the Bill down, saying: "We will not stand for it; we will not tolerate it". I would prefer to put the issue to the Canadian public. I stood in this Chamber last Thursday and said that every taxpayer I know would contribute 15 cents a month to the federal treasury simply to stop the Government from cutting money from pensioners, and I believe it. I have yet to encounter a taxpayer who would not be willing to pay 15 cents a month if he or she knew that the Government would not cut money from the cheques of pensioners.

I say to Hon. Members opposite that Canadian taxpayers believe in children and in helping those in poverty. They should