

*Government Orders*

The same can be said for those families receiving family allowance. It is already taxed back on a reasonable level. People who make over a certain income will lose a certain percentage of their family allowance. That is fair. That is what we expect. That is what the program was meant to do.

I listened with interest to the hon. minister's comments about the deficit and the business that if we do not take care of the deficit now we will not have any money for social programs in the future. That is fine, but he has already received suggestions from my hon. colleague from Kingston and the Islands, my hon. colleague from Ottawa South, my hon. colleague from Mission—Coquitlam, and a host of other opposition members of other ways in which he can reduce this deficit and not to do it by a direct attack on the elderly and on children.

I can remember several years ago at a Liberal Party convention where some people, misguided though they were, brought forward a resolution to create a means test on the family allowance. I am happy to say that it was voted down in a social policy workshop by somewhere in the vicinity of 370 to 3, because we did not stand for means tests on social programs in the Liberal Party. We stand for universality and for universality that benefits everyone at least a bit.

I recall an hon. member of the other place, a very senior senator, who had been involved in the government of this country for a long time, standing and making an emotional plea in that workshop and saying that even in the dark days of the depression when the Liberals regained the government in 1935, when things were pretty hopeless in this country, we instituted social programs on a universal basis. We did not take them away.

That is what a government that is fair and a government that cares about its people does. It does not turn around and say to elderly people who have planned their retirement years that it is suddenly going to claw back their old age pension. I just ask members opposite how easy they think it is for one wage earner making \$50,100 or whatever a year to provide for a family of two, three, or four children, to try to plan for the future, for the children's education, and to try to provide a few of the extras in life. We talk about taking back from the rich. We have already established that this salary level does not make one rich. I would suggest to you that most

members of Parliament could attest to that. Is there some sort of method in the government's madness that, if this amount of money makes one rich or if it does not, somehow we should penalize people who have children? Effectively that is what this is doing.

• (1820)

There is a whole issue relating to the family allowance which gets passed over by certainly the government members and, to a degree, even by members on this side: that women receive the family allowance. It is money that comes to women. If the women are at home and are not wage earners outside the home but have husbands, the tax for that family allowance comes off the husbands' salaries.

Almost any woman in this House—certainly many women across the country—know for a fact that in every one of our cities, towns, and villages across the country there are women in distress, women in abusive situations, women in untenable situations who have saved those family allowance cheques month to month, year to year until they have enough money to make an escape. I have seen it. I suggest that many of us have seen it.

There is a fiction created that the clawing back of this benefit is not going to create a hardship. It is going to create a hardship. We know that abusive situations, wife abuse and family violence, are not limited to the homes of the poor. They are not limited to certain regions of the country. We know that the spectre of family violence raises its head in every possible socio-economic bracket in Canada. We know that.

Anybody who works in social work, in the legal profession, or in any of the social professions dealing with people on a day to day basis will say that women use this money for an escape hatch. For many women in this situation it is already difficult to hang on to this money because in spite of the income levels of many of their husbands the response is: "I am being taxed on this. It is my money. You give it to me." Many women are coerced into endorsing over the cheques.

I have seen situations where women have just been told: "Sign it and hand it to me or I won't be responsible for the consequences." Women already have a difficulty in maintaining that which is theirs. If an abusive husband is going to be taxed at a higher rate, how much narrower a window of opportunity is his wife going to have to hang on to this money?