

*Family Allowances Act, 1973*

**Mr. Keeper:** Mr. Speaker, commenting on this matter of Family Allowances and the six and five, the Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes) wanted to know why we did not use the rules of this House to bring this matter to a halt. I must once again remind this House that the Tory Party has demonstrated its capacity in this House to stop legislation if it chooses. It did that with regard to legislation affecting the oil industry. I am still puzzled why the Conservative Party does not join us in fighting this Bill in a very vigorous way in order to stop the legislation, to ring the bells, so that families in this country can be protected. It is a puzzle, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Robert Wenman (Fraser Valley West):** Mr. Speaker, the purpose of this Bill is well known: it is to achieve restraint. That in itself is a very worthy objective and is worthy of our support. However, the objective is only worthy as long as it accomplishes its principle. In this case the program may prove to be both inequitable and counterproductive in assisting the most innocent victims of this recession, our children. The poorest of poor Canadians, those at the lower end of the economic spectrum, those who do not pay income tax, are also those who are in the greatest need and may, in fact, receive less than those in the middle and upper-income brackets. If there were no other reason than this one sense of inequity and injustice, this Bill should not pass.

Let me be graphic and state what this Bill will mean to Canadians. Once we have torn away the rhetoric and gone through the bureaucracy, the end result will mean that my oldest son, who is a young family man struggling to meet his family commitments, will receive less benefit for his son—my grandson—than I will receive for my son's younger brothers, my sons. I will benefit more from this legislation than will my son.

My son must compete in an economic market where 23 per cent of his age group are unemployed. Almost one in four of his age group are unemployed. I know how difficult it is for him to try to struggle to survive in this economy so as to pay his rent, make a payment on his car and provide basic food and clothing. Can you imagine what it is like for those who are receiving even less, those on unemployment and on welfare? What about the very poorest of the poor? We have the lower end of the spectrum, the working poor who earn \$8,000 to \$10,000 per year who are not receiving supplemental Government benefits. They are just on that line. Those people will receive less than I will or other Members' children or grandchildren will. That is not right. It is not right by any common-sense standard, by any standard of justice, equality or any principle for which this country and this House stand.

I have not heard this inequity refuted by any Member on the Government side. How can Government Members vote in support if they can neither dispute it nor find an amendment that will not allow the weakest of our nation, the most innocent victims, the children, to be adversely affected? They are the ones who will receive less than I will as a Member of Parliament and will receive less than others who are employed in the middle and upper-income areas.

This particular debate, while it focuses on one area, has three major financial elements in the current system to provide support for families and children. The one element is, of course, the Family Allowance itself. Second is the Child Tax Credit, and third is the income tax deduction or the child tax exemption. For a family with two children with a taxable income of about \$26,300, those three elements provide approximately \$800 a child per year.

The \$800 figure is a particularly interesting one as we debate this Bill today. The family with two children will receive \$800 for each child a year. That is what they will receive to support their children to give them extra benefits. That \$800 a child is the \$800 a day that is to be paid to Donald Macdonald. Is that not astounding? This Government pays \$800 a day to one of its own ex-ministers, yet that same \$800 is the total for a whole year paid for a child in Canada. Think of a child of a person unemployed, a child of a person on welfare, a child of a person employed at the lower end of the economy but poorer than those on welfare. That amount of \$800 a day to be paid to Mr. Macdonald has to stick in the throat of every Canadian. This is the injustice of the whole system. Donald Macdonald, a perpetrator of the recession, is to receive \$800 a day while the victims, the most innocent victims of that recession which he had a part in perpetrating, will have their \$800 a year reduced.

• (1240)

For a person to receive in taxable income \$800 for each of two children, he would need a gross income of around \$35,000 to \$40,000. Surely in a just and humane society one would assume that the poorest people would receive at least a little over \$800 per child rather than less. Under the current system, however, the poorer segment of Canadian society, those families who do not even earn enough to pay income tax, receive less than \$700 per child. That will be the end result of this legislation.

We must judge this legislation by its numbers and not its words. How much money does this legislation put in the hands of families for the support of their children? I wish there was one Member who could stand up before this debate is finished and say that the poor receive less is not the case. I would like to hear that said, but it is not possible because the contrary is the fact.

Rather than imposing this kind of inequity and injustice on Canadian families, the Government should be rationalizing and revamping the whole concept of the Family Allowance. This Bill is just another example of the Government's tinkering with the Family Allowance concept. We need to look at the child in the nuclear family, we need to look at the nuclear family itself and develop programs that will support both. We must consider what the legislation that we debate in the House will in fact deliver to the people in our society. This rethinking or revamping of the Family Allowance concept is unlikely to occur because the Government is apparently bankrupt of new ideas and initiatives to give Canada the forward thrust that it