

*Family Allowances Act, 1973*

● (1130)

The Minister described the Opposition in such words as "dishonourable" and "unbelievable". I suggest to Canadians watching today that by the time the debate is over they can judge for themselves who is trying to be dishonest and who is trying to be unbelievable.

When you cut through this legislation and the history of the Liberal Party in the last six years, Mr. Speaker, you come to an inescapable conclusion. The economic support provided by the Government of Canada to families through the tax system, the Child Tax Credit, the income tax deduction and the Family Allowance, has been shifted away from the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) to the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde).

As I stand here today contemplating the fact that the Liberal Party will pass this legislation later this day and that they have already acted as though it were passed—whether it is legal or illegal we will probably never discover—I know with a sense of certainty that about 60 per cent of the support for families will be coming from the Minister of Finance. The legislation which affects that will be examined by the economic committee of this House, and those Members who serve on the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs will only be examining 40 per cent of that support. That has been the trend line over the last six years.

If you go back far enough in history, it was the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the standing committee which determined the level of support for families with children. I feel very uncomfortable, and every Member of this House should feel the same way, that we are passing over control in a legislative sense to the Minister of Finance rather than to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I might suggest that different people serve on those committees and they have different interests. We are continuing to set a very dangerous precedent.

We tend to treat this as an isolated piece of legislation, something that is happening in January and February of 1983. I remind Members of this House and the Minister of National Health and Welfare that, under her stewardship and the stewardship of the Cabinet, in the year 1976 indexing of Family Allowances was suspended by the Liberal Government. The base of the Family Allowance was eroded in 1976 by a majority vote of Liberal Members in this House.

I remind the Members of this House that in 1978 the Family Allowance had grown to \$28 per child. In 1978 the Liberal Government pushed through a Bill to reduce the Family Allowance to \$20. They transferred that \$8 to the control of the Minister of Finance. They took it out of the hands of the Minister of National Health and Welfare and the Standing Committee.

I stood in this House in late 1982, four years after that 25 per cent reduction in Family Allowances in 1978, and I stand in this House today recognizing that we are being encouraged by the Minister of National Health and Welfare to erode the Family Allowance even further by passing this legislation. I

suggest to the Members of this House that they might be well advised to consider the future. Do we really want a Minister of Finance determining family social policy in this country? Do we really want that Committee of this House to determine what family policy should be? I say with all the sincerity I can muster that I do not want that and my Party does not want that. We do not think that is in the best interests of the Canadian people.

After this Bill passed second reading stage in this House, we received it in Committee in December. The Liberal majority on that Committee made it patently obvious that they would use their majority to ram the Bill through Committee in a very short period of time.

We debate this Bill for one day in this House because it is under closure. The Liberal majority has silenced the Members of this House of Commons. They have denied us our opportunity to exercise freedom of speech in this Chamber through the use of closure on this Bill and the two pension Bills. What is not apparent to the Canadian public is that the Liberals did the same thing in Committee. They used their majority to push this Bill through Committee and back to this Chamber in a hurry.

What happens when you push a piece of legislation through Committee in a hurry is that you are restricted in the number of people you can hear as witnesses. Members of Parliament are denied the right to examine public views on whether it is a positive or negative piece of legislation. On each of these Bills which cut pensions to senior citizens of this country and support for families, the Liberal Government has used closure to cut off debate in the House of Commons and has used its majority in Committee to deny Canadians the opportunity to be heard.

That is an abomination of the democratic principle. It speaks to the continued attempts of this Government over three years to ram a Constitution down our throats without adequate public examination, to ram through an omnibus piece of energy legislation on which we had to ring the bells for two weeks, simply for democracy and simply to be heard. They tried to ram through two MacEachen budgets which were disastrous for this country. We see it time and again.

We have a Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) and a Cabinet which do not believe that the voters of this country have sent to this Chamber people who care, people who work for others and should be listened to. Government Members pay absolutely no attention to a contrary view unless you hit them over the head with a two-by-four. You have to hit them again and again or they do not even consider the logic of your argument or the argument of the Canadian public.

In those brief days when the Bill was before the Committee, we did hear from some witnesses. I wish to remind Hon. Members of the categories of those witnesses and the comments they made regarding this legislation. We heard from the National Action Committee, a group in Ottawa which represents women all across the country. Their message was clear: "Don't pass this piece of legislation".