

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SOCIAL SECURITY

REQUEST FOR TABLING OF GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS ON
FAMILY ALLOWANCES

Hon. Monique Bégin (Saint-Léonard-Anjou): I should like to put a supplementary question Mr. Speaker.

My supplementary question is, since it deals with social policies:

[English]

Now that the line of the Tory government on family allowance is, "My wife doesn't need it", can the minister of social development, the secretary of state or the Minister of National Health and Welfare inform the House whether they will table the proposed Tory proposal on family allowances before Christmas, in order that Canadian mothers will know whether they will get their full indexation and what will happen to that unique federal program for families?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Before the minister rises to answer, I should correct the record. It was not the hon. member who said to me that this was a supplementary question; I made that assumption quite incorrectly. The hon. member was entitled to the floor, nonetheless.

Hon. David Crombie (Minister of National Health and Welfare): There is no proposal, Mr. Speaker, so therefore it will not be tabled. As I think I indicated in a previous answer to a question from the same hon. member, when I took over the department I carried on the work she had begun with regard to looking at all the social security programs that the Department of National Health and Welfare offers. That was both in terms of equity and to find ways in which we could provide money to those who most need it and, indeed, are most in need.

It is in the spirit of those reviews that the "proposal" came out in the newspaper. I think she well knows, and I can assure the House, that there is no proposal. That is an option which is under investigation by the department as, indeed, it was when she was the minister. I might add, now that he has raised the scare, that mothers can expect their family allowances to continue in the New Year.

● (1450)

[Translation]

INQUIRY WHETHER FAMILY ALLOWANCE BUDGET WILL BE CUT

Hon. Monique Bégin (Saint-Léonard-Anjou): I should like to put a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker.

I find the minister's reply rather inconsistent, since during the weekend the President of the Treasury Board and the Prime Minister, whom I heard myself on television, spoke about the possibility of reducing family allowances, something which was never contemplated by the Liberal government. I would like to ask the minister if he can assure this House that the total budget for family allowances, which is over \$2 billion and that for the child tax credit, which is over \$600 million,

[Mr. Speaker.]

will be earmarked, whatever the plans are, for schemes covering Canadian children, and not to keep foolish election promises?

[English]

Hon. David Crombie (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, from 1962 to 1977—

Miss Bégin: Get back to 1979.

Mr. Crombie:—the amount of money which was used for income redistribution in this country was such that it did not move the level of poverty or deal with the question of poverty in any significant way. In fact, the difficulty has been that as we put in more and more money for income redistribution, we did not target it for those most in need.

Half of the \$15 billion which goes into income redistribution does not touch those who are below the poverty line. That is why it is essential that we look not only at the family allowance, but also at the child tax exemption to see ways in which we can increase the effectiveness of the child tax credit, because it is equitable and targets at those most in need, something which I wish the previous government had done ten years ago.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

REQUEST FAMILY ALLOWANCE PROGRAM RETAIN PRINCIPLE
OF UNIVERSALITY

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. members opposite for that ovation.

In view of previous questions, and in view of the report this weekend in the *Toronto Star* concerning the government's intentions with regard to the family allowance program, can the minister assure this House today that the Conservative government will not tamper with the principle of universality on which the family allowance program is based and which the minister himself said just last week has served this country well?

Hon. David Crombie (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, as I indicated last week, indeed the family allowance program has served this country well. I cannot give the hon. member the assurance he seeks because, as I indicated, my department right now is studying ways by which we can make the family allowance program, the child tax credit and the tax exemption more equitable for those most in need. I might add that my department is also considering whether we can allocate funds to those on whom poverty rests most, that is, the young, the old, women-led families and the disabled and handicapped. That is the program of this government.

Mr. Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, if the minister cannot assure this House that the principle of universality, which we uphold, will be upheld, can he assure the House that the money saved on any deduction from universality which is embedded in the options the hon. minister is reviewing will be used for the benefit of low-income Canadians, and not handed over to the