

Family Allowances Act, 1973

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I regret to advise the Hon. Member that her time has expired. The Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin).

Mr. La Salle: Mr. Speaker—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): Is the Minister rising on a point of order?

Mr. La Salle: No, on debate.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Paproski): I am sorry. I have recognized the Hon. Member for Regina West on debate. I will recognize the Minister after his intervention.

Mr. Les Benjamin (Regina West): Mr. Speaker, I shall try to shorten my remarks in order that the Minister may have a few minutes in which to speak.

I wish to start my comments by saying to my friend, the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor), that I listened to his remarks on this amendment with great care when he made them earlier today. He said something about the petitions which have been presented under false pretences. I am sure the hon. gentleman did not mean that. I am sure all Hon. Members of the House have listened to the Hon. Member for Bow River present petitions on many occasions without ever questioning the sincerity of those who have signed them. Invariably, they are presented in this way under the inherent right of the British parliamentary system of democracy. At no time should anyone call into question the sincerity of those who petition Parliament and Her Majesty.

I hope that the Government will realize that the number of names now on petitions equals or exceeds the number of names on petitions filed with respect to the deindexing of the Old Age Security. In fact, far more signatures have been presented in this respect. Any government of any political stripe which ignores this petitioning by hundreds of thousands of Canadians does so at its peril.

The question is: For whom is this country being run? Is it being run for the people? Is it being run for families who are entitled to the family allowance? Or is it being run for banks, money-changers, corporations and speculators? For whom is it being run?

The whole principle of indexing pensions across the board came into existence in this country as a result of a minority Government in the years from 1972 to 1974. I wish that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) were in the House right now to listen to my remarks.

An Hon. Member: He was here before.

Mr. Benjamin: If he is out in the lobby, then I hope he will come in. After the 1972 election the New Democratic Party said to both Mr. Trudeau and Mr. Stanfield: "It is immaterial to us which one of you governs. In order that we do not defeat you, you must bring in full indexing of Public Service pensions, Armed Forces pensions, RCMP pensions, the Old Age Security and the Canada Pension Plan, as well as the family

allowance". Conservative after Conservative Member supported us on that occasion, including the Hon. Member for Provencher. Where is he now that we need him? Is he having trouble with the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. de Cotret) and the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson)? If he is, then we will support him in the maintenance of the full indexing of the family allowance.

Members of the Conservative Party have short and convenient memories. That applies to my colleagues in the Liberal Party who brought forward the six and five program and the three and four program which not only deindexed wages and salaries but deindexed pensions as well. Perhaps they have been converted. I wish they would have the courtesy to admit when they are wrong and say that they have changed their minds. I think that was a big step. It was very manly and very womanly. It was a sign of political integrity when the Conservative Government changed its mind with respect to the deindexing of old age pension. I wish to give members of the Government full credit for that move. I suspect there were as many, if not more, Conservative back-benchers as there were Members of the Opposition who objected to that measure as well. Thus, Conservative Members of Parliament can take credit for what was a change in mind and a change of heart. Surely, the same thing should apply in the instance of family allowances.

In effect, what this amendment says to the Government is: "To a starving man a half a loaf of bread is better than none at all". If the Government insists on going ahead with this proposal then let it do so for a period of one year. The small amount of money which it will save does not amount to very much. There are many other options by which the Government could raise more dollars in order to increase revenues. There are also many options which could be implemented to decrease expenditures other than by picking on those who cannot defend themselves.

Have Hon. Members ever seen petitions presented in the House on behalf of bankers, money-changers, the boys in the stock exchanges or those who run multinational corporations? I have not seen any. The only avenue open to those who cannot defend and protect themselves is through their Members of Parliament and through their right to petition Parliament. We do not see petitions presented here by bankers' associations. However, we see petitions presented by the parents of the children and old age pensioners. We see petitions presented by those who are not organized and who do not have the money, the power or the influence to fight their way behind the scenes in Government.

I warn the Government that if it ignores this proposal then it does so at its peril. We will haunt them for years to come if they go ahead with this measure. We will do this because the Conservative Party joined with us in that minority Government to put this indexing measure in place in the first instance. In fact, the man who originally proposed this measure in recent decades was the Hon. Bob Stanfield. He did so to his everlasting credit. As Leader of the Opposition he led the