

Family Allowances Act

security pensions, now they are launching an attack against family allowances. Next in line is unemployment insurance. Mr. Speaker, we have lost some of our faith in the promises of those men and women on the other side.

Let us get back to family allowances. I must tell you a little secret, Mr. Speaker. When I was still a young lad—I was raised in the Magdalen Islands, probably the poorest region of Canada—if my mother had not had her family allowance cheque she would have been unable to buy me the shoes and the various supplies I needed to go back to school.

Mr. Jourdenais: Otherwise he could not have become an MP.

Mr. Lapierre: One thing I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that the insignificant man from La Prairie (Mr. Jourdenais) should stop laughing and remember that some Canadian families did experience difficulties. Just because he came here with a big salary does not mean he should try to forget his modest background. Mr. Speaker, I am not anxious to ignore my humble background and leave the poor to fend for themselves. Just because we have managed to obtain the public's trust does not mean we should now leave the poor to their own devices. And that is exactly what the Hon. Member for La Prairie would have us do.

Mr. Speaker, I was saying that the family allowance cheque had a special significance. At the end of each month, when the children needed something at home, the family allowance cheque made all the difference. There are other Members who also look down on that sort of thing today, but I say that at this very moment, there are still millions of families in Canada that depend on their family allowance cheques. And I say it is unfair and inhuman to want to make cuts in the system and destroy it.

Mr. Speaker, whether it is a school bag or shoes or clothes to go back to school, I used to work at a corner store and a store where they sold men's and boy's wear, and I can assure you that in September, all those back-to-school items are paid for with family allowance cheques. Sure, all this is supposed to improve with the tax credit and tax exemptions, but let us stop putting our heads in the sand and start facing the facts. For most women in Canada, the only income they can call their own and spend as they wish is the family allowance cheque, even in families where the husband has a substantial income.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I believe family allowance payments are very important to the women and children of this country. For many Canadian families and women, this cheque may be the only cheque they get. It is the only money they have of their own to buy things for their children. You know this as well as I do, Mr. Speaker. So why does the Government want to take that away from them? That is what I find unconscionable! Mr. Speaker, I do not care what kind of advantages they are promising in the way of tax exemptions. You know that in most cases, it is not the wife who benefits.

And what about the tax credit? I can give you any number of examples of what happens when the tax credit cheque arrives. The husband uses it to buy a video and for any number of things, but the children do not get anything out of it. I will tell you why. Because the tax credit is a big cheque. You know, in most family budgets, there is always some pressing need, and whenever there are any really big debts, people say: Well, we will wait until my wife's tax credit comes in.

That is the problem. That is why the monthly cheque is so basically important, and I believe that no one can deprive Canadian women and families of this established right.

Mr. Speaker, we may see hundreds of women who will not dare admit this, but we all know the facts, and I am certain that you are aware of some cases yourself. This is what I would like the Members opposite to understand. As for their story of wanting to balance the budget, Mr. Speaker, we are not taken in. They want to balance the budget on the backs of women when they have lots of money for the Canadian Commercial Bank, which will cost us nearly \$1 billion. That is not a problem! They have enough money to buy an icebreaker that will cost \$500 million, including \$30 million a year simply to operate, and they have the audacity to tell us that they cannot afford to help Canadian families. It is shocking, Mr. Speaker. As parliamentarians, I do not think that we can accept this. Mr. Speaker, we cannot accept to see money being wasted the way the Government does it. They spent \$60 million to change the colour of the uniforms of the Armed Forces when some children do not even have any running shoes to go to school, when some children have nothing in their lunch boxes. What kind of morality do these people and this Government have? What sense of value do they have? What priorities do they have? Mr. Speaker, I think that it is time for those people to stop listening to the business sector and to start speaking to ordinary people. They should go and see the children as they enter the schools in the morning, not in the rich neighbourhoods, but where the real people live, and I am certain that they will find out in the schoolyards that the children do not have too many clothes on their backs. That is why, Mr. Speaker, this issue is so important. I am among those who benefited from the family allowances which my mother received. My school friends also benefited. If you take this away from the poor families, what will they have left? This is what we find unacceptable. You have enough money for everyone else, especially for the wealthy. You have enough money for big companies and for the oil companies. There are other Members in this House who will not admit it, but I am certain that family allowances made a difference in their own family. Salaries were not always what they are today, and I am certain that, if they had the honesty to admit it, they would say that it made a lot of difference. They have friends and they have families. Yet, they are taxing suffering, they are taxing medication, they are looking for money for all kinds of fantastic projects as long as they preserve the Prime Minister's