

Family Allowances

ty (Mr. Hellyer) who at that time was sitting as an independent, who took the technical action to stop that bill.

We had Bill C-264 as well as Bill C-170 and now we have Bill C-233 which will give temporary increases to \$12 per month to all children up to the age of 18, hopefully for the months of October, November and December. Everybody seems to agree with the bill, but the fact it is before us proves that the same objective could have been accomplished by a similar simple amendment in 1970 when there was a need, as expressed by the government, to help the children of our country and there was every reason to do so. Certainly, this action could have been taken earlier when the cost of living got out of control just a few months ago. I, and many other members, have made this suggestion for some time now but to no avail. In May of this year, Mr. Speaker, I suggested this course of action to the government, and that is on the record in *Hansard*. To quote from a late show debate on May 17, at page 3906, I am reported as saying:

The present family allowances bill could very easily have been amended as it presently exists, if there was any semblance of sincerity by the minister, instead of playing political football with poverty-stricken Canadians.

All they would really have to do, if they were concerned, would be to amend the clause in the present family allowance bill, which signifies the amount now received, by a greater amount. The only other clause required—

Which I recommended at the time—

—would be the insertion of a clause dealing with annual increases in the cost of living. This was done very simply under the old age security bill and the war veterans allowances bill and it could have been passed in record time.

Is this not what we are doing now, Mr. Speaker, apart from the insertion of the cost of living index? Could this not have been done back in 1970 when the then minister and the government agreed that, as part of their income security plan, poor families had to be given increases in family allowances? But this was not the concept of the government at that time. They were talking about selectivity in 1970 and they got themselves in such a mess with Bill C-264 and Bill C-170 that the computers could not even cope with it. Now, the minister is back to universality, with which we agree, and which everyone was suggesting with regard to family allowances three years ago.

In any case, I hope that the government has finally seen the light and that the minister will keep his promise that these increases will be contained in the October cheques. I am sure the mothers of the needy children in the country are beginning to get pretty skeptical about the government's promises on allowances. If we go back over the experience of the past three years we will see why. I appeal to the minister and the government to make every effort to implement these measures. The situation in which those citizens who have to resort to welfare find themselves is at a critical stage. It is particularly critical for the many thousands of children in these families. At least it will give a little relief to the families in my province who cannot cope with the galloping increase in the cost of living.

[Mr. Marshall.]

• (1620)

For example, under the Canada Assistance Plan and the social assistance program of my province, a family of five in Newfoundland will get the magnificent sum of \$215.00 per month. This particular family, taking for granted that they have three children under the age of 18, is now probably getting \$22 under the present family allowances scheme. So, presumably, they will get an extra \$14 per month. Together with family allowances, this family's income will now be \$250 per month. I mention this, Mr. Speaker, because even though the increases will be welcome, they will not improve the lot of this family to any great extent. Really, we should be discussing in parliament, before we leave, changes required in the Canada Assistance Plan, because many thousands of people on welfare just cannot cope with the cost of living today.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) said yesterday that government policies were directed towards relieving the suffering of those on fixed incomes. But he left out a few other citizens, Mr. Speaker. No mention has been made during the past three years of the blind. The minister has been questioned about the disabled people in our country who are under 65. How do they cope? Allow me to refer to another example that affects people in my province. Two people on long term social assistance in Newfoundland get \$140 a month on which to live.

I should like to read one of the many hundreds of letters I get from people in this category. It reads in part:

Dear Sir:

I was wondering if you could give me any information on social assistance.

I have been out of work now for six years with a bad heart, and my wife, she has angina of the heart. I am getting up in years. I am 64 and my wife is 58, so I was wondering if there is anything better than the \$140 a month.

The writer went on to say that war veterans of his age are getting aid, and that they deserve it. He says that he owns his own home, pays \$315 a year tax, and his heating bill is between \$40 and \$50 a month. In addition, he has to pay the light bill and for repairs to his home, as well as for clothing for himself and his wife. He appeals for help. He says, near the end of his letter:

So you can see for yourself what I have to live on. I am not living. I am just waiting to die. So I would appreciate it if you would let me know if there is anything going to be done.

That is typical of the many hundreds of letters that I get from people residing in my own and other parts of the country. Every time I ask the minister about this problem, the broken record is turned on: this is a provincial responsibility and we pay 50 per cent of the cost of social assistance.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), in his address last week, repeated that pledge which means nothing, namely, that if the provinces agreed to raise social assistance, the government would pay 50 per cent of the cost. Isn't it time, Mr. Speaker, that there was a halt in this game of passing the responsibility back and forth between the two levels of government and something positive was done to relieve the suffering of those citizens who do not have the means or ability to cope with inflation? Is it not time we revised the Canada Assistance Plan to allow for a bigger contribution by the federal government, particularly in the have