

Family Allowances Act, 1973

● (1110)

Mr. Speaker, strong opposition from most Canadians was instrumental in blocking the adoption of this measure before the Christmas recess. Quite appropriately they expected the Government not to change anything in the family allowances program without their consent and the approval of the House of Commons. Unfortunately it did not turn out that way. Worse still, Canadians who happened to watch television before the festive season were able to witness the Prime Minister's outright refusal to meet with the Canadian coalition made up of family organizations, women's representatives, the clergy and many other interest groups.

It is with sadness that we are resuming the debate today on an issue about which the Government has shown utter indifference towards a Canadian family policy. Contrary to what had been advocated in the Speech from the Throne, contrary to what had been promised during the election campaign, for the umpteenth time, Mr. Speaker—and we have given up counting—the Prime Minister of Canada misled the people and the House, in the sense that the Speech from the Throne, a statement of the Government's official position, made it quite clear that the Government was indeed prepared to open the debate on a family policy.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to go over past events so that Canadians and all Conservative Members might recall that the Government had tabled another document urging all citizens to express their views on the outcome of consultations held by a parliamentary committee. Bearing the official signature of a Government representative, namely the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp), this document stated clearly that amendments and discussions related to the income support program for families with children would not have anything to do with deficit reduction. Every group, every witness and every Canadian had absolutely no reason to question the intellectual honesty of the Prime Minister and of the Minister of National Health and Welfare. All Members of the Opposition and, I am sure, even the Progressive Conservative Members who sat on that committee took the Prime Minister's word. Unfortunately all of them soon came to realize they were mistaken about the Prime Minister's intellectual integrity when the Minister of Finance (Mr. Wilson) tabled his Budget containing provisions which were quite different from the Government's avowed commitments.

As a result of the debate and the many questions directed to the Government in the House of Commons, we have managed to force the Minister of Finance to admit that the purpose of his amendments to the Family Allowance Program was to reduce his deficit, and as is the case concerning several other issues, whether the Old Age Security Pension or the tragedy which I experience now with the job losses in Montreal East, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance, the Minister of National Health and Welfare and all the other members of this party are making contradictory statements.

Mr. Speaker, today I doubt very much that we could make members of the Conservative party aware of the situation, not to mention the Ministers and the Prime Minister himself who did not have the guts at least to meet the representatives of the coalition against the Family Allowance de-indexation.

As to the presumption of death which is dealt with in this bill, I sent for a Montreal mother who is suffering the tragedy of the disappearance of her child. Had it not been for the objection raised by the Official Opposition to this clause, the Minister of National Health and Welfare would have sent this mother a presumption of death certificate. Mr. Speaker, I asked that that mother, Mrs. Métivier, be heard in committee. In order not to delay the debate on this Bill, I even offered to give up ten minutes of my time to allow this mother who has personal knowledge of such a situation to advise us as to the personal impact of such a decision; by a nominal vote, however, P.C. members refused.

Mr. Speaker, Canadians will remember these members, and especially the Prime Minister. It is not too late. Although I still have some hope, I do not keep my fingers crossed, because unfortunately P.C. members much too often have disappointed the Canadian people. There remains a possibility—

An Hon. Member: That is not true!

Mr. Malépart: —I would like the Hon. Member who says that this is not true to have the courage to rise and say clearly that he agrees with the decision of his Government to provide only a 31 cents a month increase to mothers while this same Government is pushing through legislation which will provide a \$500,000 capital gains exemption for the rich.

Mr. Speaker, if the Hon. Member who has just spoken and the name of whose constituency I do not recall, but whom I could name has the courage to rise and admit publicly that he wants to defend the rich and not the poor, that is his problem. However, if he really wants to get involved in this debate or to help Canadian families, I shall not ask him to speak publicly, but ask him instead to do his job as a Government Member and raise this issue in caucus during the weekend. When the Conservatives have their caucus meeting during the weekend, they have an opportunity to put pressure on the Prime Minister and Cabinet so that, if they do not want their Prime Minister to lose face, they could perhaps not necessarily withdraw this measure immediately, but ask that the Government re-establish full indexation of allowances in the next budget.

[*English*]

Mr. Dan Heap (Spadina): Mr. Speaker, I am asking that the Government withdraw Bill C-70, a Bill to partially deindex family allowances and cut family allowances by 3 per cent per year regardless of how much higher the cost of living goes. I am asking the Government to withdraw this Bill for four reasons.

First, this Bill picks on defenceless kids. The Government tried a trick like this last year on the senior citizens. The senior