

Family Allowances Act, 1973

sage of years makes it into a very major reduction rather than simply a minor one. We know the ideological baggage and the scheme of society that comes behind it, waiting in the wings to see how this one flies, and then it will determine what will be done next.

We know that there was considerable rumbling in the Conservative Party as to the whole question of universality. We know that it was largely considerations of practical pragmatic politics, a Machiavellian calculation as to the reaction of the people of this country rather than any commitment that led the Government to draw back on some of the measures that perhaps some of its Members would have advocated.

We know that universality in such things as the family allowance is really the only guarantee of a fair equal system that is designed to serve all. Even though we realize that through a progressive taxation system it is not funded equally, it is funded according to ability to pay. We know that those systems which rely on selective measures, which rely on identifying those in the "most need", are fraught with red tape. We know that they are bureaucratic playthings. We know that the regulations that are created are increasingly complex. We know that the way in which the regulations are interpreted is often unfair and we know that the way such regulations are applied is often demeaning to the people who are intended to be served.

● (1620)

I believe it would behoove the Government to take to heart the meaning of the word "service" when dealing with the family benefit system. That system should be something that serves parents and recognizes the value of child-rearing work. Frankly, it should be a system that facilitates child-rearing and assists families rather than singling out some for different treatment than others and in some cases reducing benefits in circumstances in which benefits should not be reduced at all.

The effect of this measure, and I am sure members of the Government will say that this is either unintended or does not exist, is to divide the "haves" and the "have nots" in society more clearly than they have been divided before. In proposing to deindex the family allowance, the Government is furthering that process and that is a process that we in this Party would not like to see furthered. It is a process that we think characterizes not the wealthier and more caring societies in the world but the societies which are less caring and on average poorer. This is why we have offered the Government this amendment for its consideration and this is why I commend it to the Government for serious deliberation.

Mrs. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address Bill C-70 and the question of the deindexing of family allowances. If one looks at the Bill by itself, its provisions do not seem to be of serious consequence. It is only when the components of Bill C-70 are brought together with the child benefits program and the changes to the personal income tax system and the sneaky sales tax increases contained in the May, 1985, Budget that it becomes evident that social support

for Canadian families is rapidly declining under this Government.

The erosion of our social programs began last spring when the Conservative Government announced its plans to deindex family allowances and old age pensions. We all remember the clear public response to those two issues. We had many consultations on those issues and then "Grey Power", enabled by Members of the House, brought the Tory Government to its knees. The Government had to back down. Old age pensions were not deindexed.

The Government does not seem to learn by its mistakes. It simply regroups and tries to pull the same insensitive thing off in another way. That is why the amendment proposed by my colleague, the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell), is trying to help the Government meet its own rhetoric of promises. The Hon. Member, in her presentation, recommended a sunset clause. If it is true that the Government needs the money gained by deindexing family allowances for the reduction of the deficit, that is fine. However, the Government is now saying that everything is so rosy. Let the Government at least incorporate the sunset clause so that this measure would be terminated at the end of this year.

The Government said it was a Government of consultation, that it was open and that it would listen. I sat on many of the committee meetings. Many groups spoke before that committee. Certainly Liberal opposition Members were listening. The amendments put forward indicate that a great many more opposition Members were listening than government Members. After all the petitions that we have presented and all the groups to which we listened, perhaps government Members could speak to their caucus and bring some sense back into what is absolutely unacceptable nonsense.

I bring to the attention of the House a bulletin issued by NAC, a coalition of many women's groups. The NAC observes—

[Translation]

—this new attack against universal benefits contradicts all Conservative promises made last year to women and families.

Quebec women reacted swiftly, beginning with a core of six groups of women, including the NAC. They set up a coalition of women in favor of family allowances which now includes over 60 groups.

Elsewhere, a demonstration was held on Parliament Hill here in Ottawa, and a door-to-door petition campaign was organized from Newfoundland to British Columbia.

[English]

We certainly saw the results of those particular petitions and actions put forward by a coalition of concerned women. This concern was manifested not only by women but by men across this land.

A Budget is an interesting reflection of the social and political philosophies of a Government. We learn a great deal about a Government and what it stands for through a Budget because a Budget is not simply a balance sheet. This past year,