

### *Increased Cost of Living*

That is the reaction of one group and it is re-echoed many times. I am sure the minister is aware of editorial opinion as expressed in the newspapers. The reaction of the editorial writers is consistent with the general reaction across the country. The minister's statement of April 27 was an affront to parliament. It showed contempt for this House and, more particularly, it was an affront to the special Committee on Trends in Food Prices which worked diligently to come up with the recommendations it placed before the House.

In the midst of all this, in the midst of the latest figures released by Statistics Canada a couple of days ago, showing a 2.6 per cent increase in the cost of food for the month of April, what are we doing? What is parliament doing? What are the priorities of the government? At a time when food, shelter and clothing prices are soaring, parliament occupies itself with amendments to the wildlife legislation. What are the legislative priorities for the balance of this week and next week? These open-ended opposition days, where the issue will not be resolved because there is no vote, by virtue of what I consider to be anomalies in the new rules, were designated by the government. They were not designated by the Official Opposition or by either of the other parties. It is the government which manages the business of the House. It was the government which said we should deal yesterday with amendments to the wildlife legislation. And this at a time when the whole country was talking about the scandalous increase in the price of food.

**Mr. Gray:** You could have had a vote today if you had wanted it.

**Mr. McGrath:** Certainly, the government is not getting its priorities straight. There is concern about this issue across the country. What shall we be doing next week? We shall be dealing with the question of capital punishment. Mr. Speaker, that bill has been around since this session began. Yesterday the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Whelan) said the poor were suffering because of high food prices but that the rest of us were spoiled. And, in that statement he recommended that the government should increase family allowances. Surely, in view of this, the government should re-arrange its legislative program in line with the consensus which exists in the House and immediately bring in amendments to increase family allowances thus placing money directly into the hands of the poor.

The Prime Minister, in his continuing efforts to deceive and mislead the House, talks about the fact that increases in family allowances could have been made last year, but for the Official Opposition. I reject that statement as being a gross deception. The Prime Minister, as the leader of this country, should show responsibility as such, and not mislead the House. The opposition did not prevent that bill getting through.

**An hon. Member:** Yes, you did.

**Mr. McGrath:** That bill was withdrawn by the government because they were getting flak from the government of Quebec. That is true, and the present Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) knows of what I speak because he was the Prime Minister's emissary to Quebec. That was why the bill was withdrawn.

[Mr. McGrath.]

They talk about one man holding up third reading of that bill. The fact of the matter is that the House could have sat next day and given third reading to the measure. Or the government could have brought the bill on when the House met in emergency session in September to deal with the Vancouver dock strike. There was a disposition among all members to bring it on at that time.

The situation now is that after five years of study there is no FISP arrangement. It took approximately five years to come up with a Family Income Security Plan and now it is defunct. What do we have instead? We have a policy announced by the minister as a result of a federal-provincial conference under which the family allowance will be increased to \$20. He talks about some new mechanism in connection with which he needs the consent of the provinces. I say to the minister: Bring in the increase in the present family allowances right away, as an interim measure. Let us not wait another six months for the new program mentioned by the minister following the federal-provincial conference. Let him bring in legislation now as a means of getting money directly into the hands of the low income group, those with large families and those living on fixed incomes, the people who are feeling the squeeze. The poor cannot wait six months for the minister's bill, they need money now. They have to buy food every day.

Where are the poor of this country? They are in the large cities where inflation is highest. They are in areas of regional disparity where incomes are low and unemployment is high. They constitute a very substantial majority in this country who are suffering from the consequences of the complete failure of the government to relieve the burden imposed on them by inflation. When the Prime Minister rises in this House to respond to questions, I challenge him to place the facts before the House instead of continuing to try to deceive the people of Canada. The fact is that we could have had the family income security plan, and we could have had it before the close of the last session of the last parliament; it could have been in effect now.

I point out that as an interim measure the government can change its legislative program and immediately bring in amendments to the present Family Allowances Act. There is a disposition on the part of members in the House to deal with this matter expeditiously because it would put money into the pockets of the poor, those with large families and on fixed incomes.

The Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) spoke today, and I listened very carefully to what he said. I am sure that other members on the government side will confirm, and I am sure a reading of *Hansard* will also confirm, that the minister categorically rejected any suggestion of a freeze or any kind of controls as a means of fighting inflation. But I heard no reference whatsoever to what the government does propose to do. There was no mention in the minister's speech of the government's contingency plan. The fact is that there is no contingency plan.

**Mr. Cullen:** Then, why ask about it?

**Mr. McGrath:** Because the Prime Minister has said that there is one. The Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs appeared before the special committee on food