

*Family Allowances Act, 1973*

herself, every outside group of witnesses who appeared advised us clearly not to do this. Perhaps the most compelling and graphic presentation was made by a group who represents low-income citizens in Ottawa.

To put the matter in perspective for all of us on the Committee, they told us the following. In a self-help manner, they have organized a transportation system to take members of this low-income group to grocery stores which have the lowest priced food. They told us that if they were to schedule that transportation for the day before the Family Allowance cheques arrived in the homes, nobody would use it. These are low-income Canadians. Therefore, the day before the Family Allowance cheque arrives, there would be no one to use the transportation system.

They deliberately put that transportation system in place for the day after the Family Allowance cheques arrive. Therefore, their transportation is used. Mothers of this nation who live at or near the poverty line each month take their Family Allowance cheque to the lowest-cost grocery store they can find and buy the maximum amount of nutritious food for their children.

That is the purpose to which the Family Allowance cheque is put. That is the purpose which the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) asks us to ignore. In a world riddled with uncertainty and inflation, the Minister of National Health and Welfare of this country asks us to cut the Family Allowance cheques which mothers use to buy food for their children.

When the Minister appeared before the Committee, she told us that the Government must do this, that old age pensioners and families must lead in the fight against inflation. I wish the Minister had been in Committee to hear some of the witnesses, in particular the labour union groups who to varying degrees have considerable economic expertise in their research organizations.

The group we heard this morning was speaking to the pension Bill, but they put the Family Allowance payments into perspective for us. They told us that the saving would amount to .05 per cent of the federal budget. That is one-twentieth of 1 per cent. In gross national product terms, that is 1/100 of 1 per cent. For anybody to believe that that kind of expenditure difference will have any impact on inflation is just incredible. In national terms, that amount is so tiny that it will not affect inflation one whit, one iota or one little bit.

The Government's case for the necessity of this Bill is further eroded when the Minister comes before us and says that inflation is reducing, that it is coming down. A number of spokespersons for the Cabinet stand up in this Chamber whenever they have the occasion to tell us that their program is working, that inflation is coming down. Stop and consider that statement for just one minute. It is a true statement; inflation in this country is coming down. However, the second part of the Minister's case is that therefore we need to take money away from families and pensioners. That statement collapses because we have not done it and yet inflation is coming down. We do not need to take money away from pensioners or from children.

• (1230)

Inflation is coming down for another set of reasons. I hope, Mr. Speaker, that on this particular piece of legislation, and the pension Bills which follow, the backbenchers on the other side will collectively begin to meet in the corridors and in their offices and start to exercise some sense of social responsibility. The Liberal backbenchers have an obligation to join with the Opposition in telling the Cabinet they are doing something wrong and we will not tolerate it. They do not have to bring the Government down and cause a general election; they just have to tell the House Leader that they will not stand in this Chamber and vote for this legislation. A quiet word to the Minister and this legislation will not come before us, and on January 1, 1983 those cheques for pensioners and families will go out under the present system, fully indexed.

Our parliamentary tradition, the very basis for the existence of this Chamber, is the belief that in all the ridings in this country people vote freely and democratically for someone to represent them here. Out of the Hon. Members of this Chamber we choose a Cabinet. Cabinet Members come from the Party that has the most seats in the Chamber. But the obligation is on all of us Commoners, regardless of Party; the Government proposes, but it is the backbenchers who dispose. We, the backbenchers of this House, either approve the plans of the Cabinet or make our disapproval known. And it is possible, Mr. Speaker, in the next four days for the backbenchers on the Liberal side of this House to meet quietly, to think through this problem, and to communicate to their House Leader and the Minister their disapproval of these three pieces of legislation which take money out of the pockets of children and senior citizens, which take food out of the bellies of children and the senior citizens of this country.

A growing proportion of Canadians live at or near the poverty line, and when you live there, Mr. Speaker, the little money you get in a world so full of inflation is needed for survival, not luxuries. It is needed for good health, good nutrition, good medical care, good shelter. That is what the money is needed for, and that is what the Minister of National Health and Welfare is asking us to take away from these people.

All of us who represent constituencies in this Chamber know what is happening in our communities. I come from the community of Calgary, Alberta, and for a number of years now it has had the reputation of being one of the most economically advantageous places to live. I was looking over some newspaper clippings yesterday which reported that welfare rolls in the City of Calgary from October to November went up 11.9 per cent. That is in one month, Mr. Speaker. From October to November unemployment went up from 9.5 per cent to 11.4 per cent. That is almost 2 per cent in 30 days. The vacancy rate in my City in the last 12 months has changed from two-tenths of 1 per cent to the highest in the country, at 8.2 per cent. What that tells us is that the unemployment rate in that community would be somewhere near 20 per cent if all those Canadians who had moved to Calgary had stayed there. But they have not; they have returned in many, many cases to