

*Family Allowances Act, 1973*

The Hon. Member for Broadview-Greenwood (Ms. McDonald) referred to federal Government advertising programs that cost \$60 million when she was talking about old age pensions. This money would pay for the funds the Government is trying to bilk out of the hides of senior citizens under the other Act. We can suggest other examples, such as embassies which are not needed at this time.

The amount which is paid to approximately 3.5 million mothers on behalf of seven million children covers children under the age of 18. We know that our birth rate in Canada is declining and certainly the cost of raising children is a major factor in that decrease.

As I mentioned in the House the other day, the only group in which there is a large increase in the birth rate is among adolescent mothers. This tragedy, which I pointed out in the House, was not responded to in a positive way by the Minister, and it must be recognized by the Government. Since the majority of these adolescent mothers unfortunately keep their children and raise them by themselves, in many cases the Family Allowance is basic to their survival and that of their parents who often take over the responsibility of raising the children.

The Family Allowance Program covers approximately 50 per cent of our population who have children under 18 years of age. I have indicated that it is very important that this allowance be paid on a monthly rather than yearly basis. I was very surprised that the Minister of National Health and Welfare talked about perhaps making changes to the Child Tax Credit so that it be provided two or three times a year. I believe she indicated that she thought this Child Tax Credit was a nice bonus at the end of the year which might allow families to buy a refrigerator or some other item. I wonder where she has been. Has she recently talked to any families on welfare or families who are trying to live on unemployment insurance? Has she talked to any families who are trying to pay off a mortgage? They do not need that money for a new refrigerator. They need to put food on the table, and in many cases toward the end of the month it is very little food.

We feel that the Liberals and the Tories—I would like to hear from Conservative Members if they disagree—would like to establish a means test for most social programs, targeting these programs primarily to families in need. If this is true I would suggest that they are the mean Party. We believe that we must have universal Family Allowances just as we must maintain fully indexed old age pensions. These can be partially paid for by a reform in the tax system. However, there must be an adequate income support system as well. This is where I think the child tax system is justified. We would like to see further steps taken in that direction. It is the beginning of a guaranteed income system, but is presently far below the poverty line.

We do not favour the present punitive welfare system which essentially imposes a means test on Canadians. The welfare system does not provide incentives and, in fact, acts as a disincentive for many people, particularly single mothers, to finding alternatives and working for independence.

The present welfare system does not integrate the administration of national and provincial income support programs.

There are many varied programs with different eligibility requirements. Each Department has its own "fraud squad" which attempts to develop ways to deny people's requests. There are many highly paid bureaucrats who administer these programs since they are not integrated. Our Party suggests that there should be a reform of social programs. The whole question of Child Tax Credits and Family Allowances should be an integral part of this review.

The debate on Family Allowances cannot be limited to past and present economic circumstances only. We must retain a fully indexed Family Allowance but we must continue to look at the future. It is important that we consider all our social programs and policies with respect to future trends which, in some ways, are quite frightening for us to consider. In view of revolutionary societal changes which will take place, if they have not already happened, we must be prepared to re-evaluate and redesign the entire Canadian income support system. The micro technology revolution is displacing workers permanently and eliminating obsolete jobs in many sectors of our economy, particularly in the service, sales and clerical sectors which employ so many women. Massive layoffs, which are causing so much suffering at the present time, may prove to be permanent. It is frightening to think of workers in the forest industries, in many other resource industries and in the automotive industry in this country who were on unemployment insurance. They have exhausted their benefits and are now facing the need to apply for welfare. If we do not correct this situation they will remain on welfare. Of course, they lose all their savings and assets before they can apply for welfare benefits. Fully indexed Family Allowances are essential to their survival. However, from a long range point of view, we must do everything we can to create more jobs immediately and to plan for economic recovery, which will create whole new areas of jobs with different time arrangements. However even with the best of plans, one wonders if full employment in the traditional sense will ever be achievable again in Canada. Meanwhile, families will suffer and Family Allowances must be sustained and, hopefully, increased.

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It is also urgent that we redesign and update our income support system and integrate the Child Tax Credit so that it will be available in a positive way as a right to supplement part-time wages. Part-time jobs may very well become a permanent way of work for many families in future. Hopefully, with planning, the robots which will come as a result of our technological revolution will be able to increase our gross national product so that we will be able to pay adequate income support supplements to retain families above the poverty line. We also need new kinds of work which are fulfilling and meaningful to society. Unfortunately, time does not allow us to debate futuristic matters further today. However, I would urge that all Parties put this on the agenda for full debate of social policy at a future time.