

Family Allowances Act, 1973

and real cost of food and shelter. They are struggling very hard to survive on fixed incomes which are at a very marginal level for the majority of senior citizens. I have spoken before at length about the particular impact of that Bill on elderly women in Canada.

Having imposed its will on workers and pensioners, particularly older women, the Government finally had to attack the most vulnerable group in Canada, women and children. Bill C-132, forced through this House by closure, is an outright attack on Canada's children and another slap in the face for Canadian women. It is no wonder that child abuse and wife battering are on the increase in Canada, Mr. Speaker, with this kind of Government example.

Mr. Ogle: Government abuse.

Mrs. Mitchell: Government abuse, as my colleague says. The Liberals could not even wait until they had forced this legislation through the House; they went ahead and capped the indexing on Family Allowances for the month of January. This was not only immoral, it was illegal and I think the Minister was really quite disappointing this morning when she tried to justify that. I think this indicates the lack of respect the Liberals, and the Minister in particular, have for women and children as well as for the laws of this land.

We have documented in many speeches why we oppose Bill C-132. Family Allowances, fully indexed, are a basic right of Canadians, developed and accepted from coast to coast many years ago to help with the cost of raising Canada's children. This allowance is the means by which the state, society as a whole and childless taxpayers in Canada, contribute to future generations and recognize the important function of parenting.

The Family Allowance is a monthly payment paid directly to the mother, and perhaps it should also be extended to fathers where they are the primary parenting person. It is the only cheque that many women receive in their own name. We believe this allowance should be increased, not decreased, in order to help meet the increasing costs of child care.

We believe the Government restraint rationale is fallacious. Reducing indexing to 6 per cent will not affect inflation. The Minister, referring to the Government restraint program in Committee, called it "a sword, a psychological weapon", not a financial weapon which was going to put money into job creation in any appreciable amount or have much impact, if any, on inflation generally. We agree it is a sword and the facts show that it will net very little financial return to the Government.

There is no real financial reason why this action was taken by the Government. It unfairly penalizes every family in this country with children under 19 years of age. As my colleague the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North (Mr. Orlikow) pointed out very clearly in questioning the Minister, it imposes a permanent reduction in the basic amount of the Family Allowance Program which will affect lower income families as well, even though there will be a temporary, one-year increased bonus for the Child Tax Credit if another Bill goes through.

Families need a fully-indexed Family Allowance cheque. We heard this over and over again in Committee from the groups which appeared there, particularly low-income families and groups representing low-income people. We know that many if not most families rely during tough times on that Family Allowance cheque to cover basic family expenses at the end of the month. I have said before, Mr. Speaker, that many families on welfare or unemployment insurance use this cheque to buy groceries, indeed to go out and buy food because the cupboard is empty as the end of the month draws near. Even for higher income families there is a value inasmuch as the cheque goes to the mother, recognizing the important role she has in parenting. In those cases also, although the husband may be wealthy and have a higher income, there is no guarantee, as we have heard from women's groups, that the woman in the house has money or income in her own name.

Every single organization, and there were quite a number of them, to appear before the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs opposed Bill C-132 because they thought it was a regressive Bill. We heard from the Canadian Council on Social Development a very fine analysis of social programs generally, and I would hope that we would be getting at some of the broader social issues which they raised and the need for a general review and reform of all programs which affect families.

The National Council on Social Welfare, again a very sound group which does excellent research on the impact of legislation on low-income groups, also presented briefs opposing this measure, as did the National Action Committee on the Status of Women, representing hundreds of women's groups across Canada. The Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women also opposed it. Low-income groups that appeared, particularly some from Ottawa, opposed it very strongly and told us in very emotional terms how much the Family Allowance cheque meant to them. We heard from Public Service labour groups as well.

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Finally, we object strenuously to Bill C-132 because it denies and erodes the principle of universality in favour of a limited—so we are told—temporary gift of \$50 on the Child Tax Credit. We have yet to see this.

We believe fully-indexed, universal social allowances like old age pensions and Family Allowances are the soundest method of providing social security in Canada. Universal Family Allowances eliminate the stigma and the cost of a means test. They recognize equally all children in Canada, and mothers, equally each month. The cost is retrieved partially through an income tax-back provision from higher income earners.

We believe there must be major tax reforms to make this system work more equitably and to the benefit of lower income families. On this subject, I would like to refer to an interesting proposal called "Family allowances: How to save and pay to all" in an article by Jonathan Kesselman, Professor of Economics at the University of British Columbia, which was