

ever since they came into power, he spoke entirely beside the question telling me how much he approved the child tax credit created by the Liberals.

Why did I suddenly ask such a question? Because serious rumour in women's organizations and in social planning councils has it that the Progressive Conservatives have decided to remove part of the family allowances to finance their credit, that is some \$575 million for the first year.

We saw during the weekend that the cat was again out of the bag as evidenced by an article in the *Toronto Star* and another in *Dimanche-Matin*. Even the Prime Minister (Mr. Clark) in Gander was compelled to admit that such an idea was being considered by the Progressive Conservative government. Again today I put my question to the minister who once again answered beside the question, this time referring to the redistribution of income and to poverty. He also deceived the House and the Canadian people when he made them believe that I had myself initiated a review of family programs for children which he only carried on. This is entirely false. The work which I undertook in my former department dealt with the creation of a Canadian guaranteed annual income plan.

As long as an annual income guarantee proposal is not put forward in this House, I will find it unbelievable that a minister whose mandate is to improve the family policy can be so weak in front of his cabinet colleagues as to consider taking the family allowances from certain children. Is the minister for children ready to sacrifice nearly \$1 billion in fiscal exemptions for children, and a good part of the \$2 billion family allowances, in order to finance the Conservative election promises of his Minister of Finance (Mr. Crosbie)? He would then be on an equal footing with the minister of the underprivileged, which he is at that, who will sell out Canada's poor during a secret meeting of the welfare ministers Monday next, November 12, behind closed doors, at the Four Seasons hotel in Toronto. Is he so weak in cabinet—he who is not even in charge of the committee on social affairs—who is not political minister from Toronto, who is the junior to the future super-minister of social development who is not even appointed yet, that he cannot hold his own before the Treasury Board bureaucrats and the economics ministers, who do not give a hoot about the seven million Canadian children who are still receiving family allowances? To whom and for how much will the children's budget be sold out in a country where provincial governments do not develop policies for the support of families, and where 2,000 day care places were lost during last year only? No redistribution policy, Mr. Speaker, and I shall conclude on this, can replace a family policy. And neither should be sacrificed by any minister who cares, who believes in the quality of life.

Family allowances, after all, are but a timid step to promote birth and prove to young couples and especially mothers that our society believes in and wants to help Canadian families. In cases where a couple earns \$35,000, Mr. Speaker, the wife

Adjournment Debate

does not get that salary, and often the only cash that goes to the mother is the family allowance cheque.

I therefore conclude on this suggestion: a government that intends to do such a thing and cancel family allowances is totally cut off from the grass roots.

[English]

Mr. Stan Schellenberger (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, when the hon. member raised her question about family allowances the other day, the minister made reference to developments a year ago when the hon. member occupied the post of minister of national health and welfare. At that time the hon. member sponsored new legislation which reduced the amount of the universal family allowance from approximately \$28, which it would have reached last January under normal escalation, to an even \$20 per month. At the same time a new child tax credit was introduced in association with the income tax system under which families could receive an annual amount of up to \$200 per child depending on the amount of family income. This was, in effect, a move away from universality and an increased emphasis on selectivity in the provision of child benefits.

We on this side of the House supported that legislation at the time because it represented an attempt to ensure that government assistance to families to meet the costs of raising children was being directed more efficiently toward those with the greatest need. Of course, we recognized this was a new step. It was an experimental step, so to speak, but we felt it was something worth a try, and therefore we supported the legislation in this House.

It may well be that the hon. member may be posing her question in order to give the minister an opportunity to expand on the government's future policy in the child benefit system. He is not prepared to do that at this time, and I think it is reasonable for him to take that position after only a few months in this portfolio. I know that the hon. member opposite and her colleagues spent many years studying the child benefit system and possible improvements to it before they were able to come to a decision which led to the legislation a year ago. While the minister does not intend to take as long as his predecessors in coming to conclusions, I think it is only reasonable for him to have a little more time to look into the whole system of child benefits which the Government of Canada administers at this time: the universal family allowance payments, the more selective child tax credit and, of course, the tax exemptions under the income tax system.

I will simply say at this time that the minister is aware of the important role the universal family allowance has played in Canada. He also regards the experience with the child tax credit over the past year to have been an interesting one and something worth careful consideration and assessment. I can assure the House that the whole field of child benefits is one of the minister's priority interests in his portfolio, and he will be giving serious study to possibilities for improving the system. Indeed, this government accords a high priority to social programs generally and to seeking improvements which will