

In its arguments, which we have heard time and time again, the government have stated that they could not afford to increase pensions or family allowances. In saying that, how on earth do they assume that the Canadian consumer can afford to pay exorbitant prices for food and clothing for his children? All families have been forced to cut corners and make do, especially families of low or moderate income.

Consider, Mr. Speaker, what faces a mother who is sending her children back to school. She has to buy new clothes and shoes for her children. I have received letters to the effect that this fall many mothers are not doing this; they are patching clothes, using hand-me-downs for their children, trying to stretch the life span of a pair of shoes. They are cutting back in this way in order to try to beat the high cost of living. But how on earth do you cut back on essential foods? Growing children need proper nourishment and you cannot cut back on this. Yet the government has sat placidly by watching month by month as the cost of food has risen.

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Of course, we have Mrs. Beryl Plumptre, chairman of the Food Prices Review Board. What kind of soothing advice did she give to people trying to beat the cost of living? To mothers of families she said, "Don't buy the more expensive kinds of food. Don't buy steak. Use hamburger instead." I checked the price of hamburger in my constituency, Mr. Speaker. Last year it was 88 cents a pound; now it is \$1.12 a pound. There is small comfort there. People cannot even afford hamburger if they are members of unorganized labour, if they do not have unions to help increase their wages or if they are living on fixed incomes.

While the Minister of Finance and the government refused to recall parliament to deal with the issues, somehow mothers had to feed and clothe their families. As I have said, it was hard enough for middle-income families, and it was virtually impossible for the 4½ million poor in Canada, those already living below the poverty line. How on earth did the government expect them to cope with the situation? If it had not been for the railway strike and the NDP shopping list we would not have this bill before us today. This bill, to raise family allowances immediately, is only a stopgap measure, and the government well knows it.

Time and again we have tried to prod the government into action, but how reluctant it has been to move. There has never been real initiative on its part. It has always adopted ad hoc measures, reacting to the pressures of the moment, to public opinion and to the minority situation in which it finds itself. From the government and its predecessor we have not seen a concentrated attack on the cost of living in the broader perspective, and by this I mean a redistribution of income through a fair tax policy. I do not know how many members of this House and of the Canadian public are aware of the injustices that are present in our tax system and in the distribution of wealth.

My colleague from Oshawa-Whitby alluded to this point this afternoon, with many statistics. I would like to cite but one. In 1961, taking into account all taxes direct and

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indirect, a family earning under \$2,000 a year paid 60 per cent of its income in taxes, whereas families with income over \$10,000 paid only 38 per cent of their income in taxes. This unjust system was continued for over a decade by successive Liberal and Conservative governments. Recently some relief was afforded through reforms in the personal income tax laws which our party advocated when the House met in January and which were reflected in the Speech from the Throne.

We do well to remind ourselves of the other side of the coin, that our tax policies point out where the concern of the old-line parties really lies. Here I am referring to the tax concessions given to large corporations. This Liberal government, which says it is so concerned about the average Joe Public, gave \$500 million in tax cuts to large corporations in its recent budget, despite the tremendous increase in corporate profits over the last quarter of the previous year.

I want the Canadian people to think what that \$500 million would have meant had it been distributed among Canadian families to help them meet the cost of living. If it were distributed among the 3½ million families with children, it would average \$140 per family. That would have been a constructive move. That would have been meaningful. That would have been a fair and just way to help the Canadian people. But I have no confidence that we will get such a just tax system from the Liberal government or from its mirror image, the Conservative party.

Now the government is giving an increase of \$6 or \$8 per child through the proposals in this bill. This is too little, too late. But still it is better than nothing. I want the Canadian public to reflect on the history of the old-line parties, especially the Liberal party and its family income security programs. There has been no real initiative on its part in launching a basic attack on the cost of living and on income inequalities. Such initiative will not spring from within that party. It takes prodding. It takes pressure from the public. It takes pressure from the parties in this minority House of Commons to get the government to act. Over the years the NDP has been the catalyst. In the past we have argued for adequate social security measures, adequate pensions and adequate family allowances. We will continue to do so. We will support this bill as a stopgap measure, but we will continue to argue for greater increases and for a fair and just over-all social security policy.

Mr. Douglas Roche (Edmonton-Strathcona): Mr. Speaker, I will support this bill to increase family allowances to \$12 per month per child. But to remain silent would be to turn my back on my true feelings about the bill and the economic and social policies of the government. I think these feelings are shared by many, if not most Canadians today who are bewildered, frustrated and disillusioned by the erratic, self-serving approach of the federal government.

Indeed, Sir, last week I conducted interviews with 159 of my constituents in various economic and social areas of Edmonton-Strathcona. I found that 52 per cent of the people I talked to are dissatisfied with the performance of the government, and 64 per cent think the government is not taking sufficient steps to control inflation. There is a