

me, but he once spoke of the present government as the "ad hockery night in Canada." The buying power of increased allowances has already been used up by the increase in the cost of living which has taken place during the past year. No one, surely, has to document this painfully obvious fact. Food prices are rising at an unacceptable rate, resulting in a serious effect on the nutrition of Canadians. A study carried out in Montreal shows that fully 20 per cent of the population lives in poverty and that 44 per cent of the city's slum families are undernourished.

Advice such as that given to consumers by the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs (Mr. Gray) to use "evasive action" when shopping, that is, to substitute for high-priced food items less expensive ones of equal nutritional value is, to put it bluntly, a lot of nonsense since, unfortunately, the prices of the latter are rising even faster than those of the higher priced items. Compare hamburgers with sirloin and you get the picture. Regrettably, unfortunately, but truly, the low income consumers today are the hardest hit by rising prices, especially the 25 per cent of Canadians—and what an appalling statistic that is—who are living below the poverty line. According to the Economic Council of Canada, one and a half million families, or 22 per cent of all family units in Canada today, are poverty stricken. Therefore, any ameliorative measures such as this are hardly conceived and executed in haste.

● (2010)

The Senate Committee on Poverty of 1971 stated that the over-all poverty rate was approximately 25 per cent, and that one Canadian in four was a member of a family unit whose income was below the poverty line. Canadians living on low and fixed incomes are further hit, as a recent ECC study shows, by the fact that "the general burden of taxation falls unfairly on lower income families when it is measured in terms of ability to pay".

Genuine government attempts to control the cost of living would be of more value to those living in poverty than an increase in family allowances which barely reflects the rise in the cost of living. Therefore, I call again for what I called for at 4.55 this afternoon—a meaningful, powerful and co-ordinated assault upon inflation, a concerted effort to buttress the economy of the country. This is what we must have and it is what we need.

I mentioned that this minister, and the whole area of welfare, is being used as the only apparent weapon to fight the terrible dragon of inflation. But even this minister's exertions must soon come to an end; he will run out of bills on the order paper, and what will we do then? Even Mrs. Plumptre has finished her cross-country safari, an assault made with almost as much noise and exactly as much success as the charge of the Light Brigade.

The minister referred to his satisfaction at increases in old age security. But what of the plight of the older Canadians whose pensions are already grabbed up by the greedy, insatiable maw of inflation? And if that is not enough, their nursing homes are taking up the slack, charging as much as they can as quickly as they can after the increase is put into effect; because these institutions, too, are gripped by a rate of inflation which is making this

### *Family Allowances*

country a bad example among the developed countries of the world on the inflation spectrum. Among some of the most prestigious international economic bodies, we in Canada are being designated as the country least likely to succeed in its anti-inflation measures. What a prospect, what a reputation, what a profile before the world!

In so far as this measure offers relief to hard-pressed Canadians who have families, as I said earlier we of course welcome it and will support it. We will make no effort in any way likely to delay implementation of this measure. We want the cheques in the hands of the mothers of Canada in time. Indeed, I suggested some weeks ago that they should now be receiving \$20 instead of the \$12 provided in the interim measure, but my view was not accepted by the minister or the government.

However, with regard to the 100,000 Canadians with young families I must say again that, important though this group is, it is but one of a great body of hard-pressed Canadians. Let the rest not be forgotten as the minister takes as much credit as he can from his efforts.

The government has taken some time to get a meaningful family allowance measure into the legislative flow. We all remember the FISP bill of inglorious memory, and we remember the various plans which were put forward and later aborted during the last four years. This afternoon I expressed the need for a close and careful committee study of this bill. Some of the questions that spring to my mind are of a general nature and to a degree are questions of principle. Others are technical and administrative but none the less important.

In the first category, I should like to hear more about what the minister referred to as the bill's being a measure of regional distribution of income across the country. On the first page of his speech, which I now have available to me, the minister said:

In addition, it will advance the development of a more equitable regional redistribution of income across Canada.

A desirable goal, but I should like to hear a bit more about it. Perhaps the minister meant that with greater flexibility the individual provinces could mount a more equitable assault on poverty within their own bounds. That may well be so, and I trust the ministers of welfare who are concerned and knowledgeable about the matter have expressed their views. But we must ask if there is a danger of variations between provinces growing rather than decreasing as the amounts vary from province to province under a highly flexible system.

An inescapable fact of our federalism is that the provinces range widely in fiscal capacity. They may be juridically equal, they may be peers constitutionally, but when we get to the realm of fiscal capacity we come to an area of painful inequality and widespread variation. Might we not be faced with a situation where the people of the poorer provinces will fall behind their fellow Canadians in the wealthier provinces in confederation? On this I should like further explanation and assurance. Is the Dominion Government, the great equilibrating agency of confederation, able to guarantee, will it guarantee, a measure of equality or near equality to the people of all provinces? Was the bill founded on a clear awareness of this very serious question? I welcome assurances in this regard from the minister when we move into committee.