

[Translation]

Mrs. Lucie Pépin (Outremont): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to this amendment, especially after what I just heard. I heard one of my colleagues on the Government side inform the House that the Opposition Parties were distorting the provisions of this Bill and that we were playing on people's sentiments with our comments on the disappearance of children.

I do not think it is purely a partisan position, because if you look at the coalition of women's groups that made a joint representation on this question—and I will mention just those from Quebec—we have the *Association féminine d'éducation d'action sociale*, the *Comité d'action sur le statut de la femme*, the *Comité de la condition féminine*, *Action Travail Femmes*. There are quite a few. There are also parents who come to testify and asked to have these allowances maintained.

My hon. friend said earlier: What do you think the Government should do when a family has been receiving family allowances for three years and the child is found dead? I simply want to comment that the loss or disappearance of a child is followed by a period of mourning. When someone dies, there is a period of mourning that may last from one to three years. When a child disappears, the situation is quite different, because there has been no death to confirm the child is dead.

And that is why families whose children have disappeared cannot say after three or six months: My child is dead and the file is closed. So when we are talking about playing on the sentiments and feelings of families, I think my Government colleague has his sentiments mixed up and does not know what he is talking about.

It is also true that the families receiving these family allowances are spending the money wisely. Families where a child has disappeared have told us that the small amount they receive is used to pay companies and individuals to trace the child, and there are also lawyers' fees, and so forth.

So I am very sorry but I don't think it is up to the Government to decide that when a child has disappeared, the period of mourning ends after six months. I don't think the Government can legislate this. In fact, I think we should listen to the groups that came here to submit briefs and who also supported the steps taken by Mrs. Métivier.

There is also the Association of Quebec of Human Rights Committees, the *Association pour la défense des droits sociaux du Québec métropolitain*, the *Centre communautaire sud-asiatique*, the *Centre d'éducation d'action des femmes*, the *Centre des femmes de Laval*, and I could go on. When we are talking about emotional honesty, I think and I don't want to be biased or be accused of partisanship but I think that we are now legislating something that does not have to be legislated, and I think anyone who knows the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) and recognizes the qualities of the Minister as mentioned by my hon. colleague would agree

Family Allowance Act, 1973

he could reconsider the legislation and meet the request for maintaining family allowance payments. I have not spent six years studying this kind of legislation, but I have worked long enough with families, especially needy families, to realize that the Government can act with a measure of compassion, and I don't think anyone would blame the Government for doing so. Therefore, I do not agree and cannot support this motion.

Mrs. Gabrielle Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I rise to say a few words and set the debate in its proper context. My colleague who has just resumed her seat referred to missing children and the anxiety of families whose children have died or simply vanished. The Bill does not deal with such cases. Here is how Clause 5 of the Bill reads:

—under circumstances that, in the opinion of the Minister, raise beyond a reasonable doubt a presumption that the child is dead—

Not that he is missing, but that he is dead.

—the Minister may issue a certificate declaring that the child is presumed to be dead—

It has nothing whatsoever to do with missing children whose whereabouts are unknown. The downed Air India aircraft has often been given as an example since in fact, beyond any reasonable doubt, all children aboard the aircraft were presumed to be dead. This is where the Bill applies, not in cases where children have simply disappeared.

[English]

Mr. Stan J. Hovdebo (Prince Albert): Mr. Speaker, I know that a number of the previous speakers from the Government side have attempted to suggest that members of the Opposition are using a political approach to this particular clause. If there was some evidence to show that the Government was being compassionate across the board, we might accept the fact that this particular clause was put in place for compassionate reasons. However, we have no evidence of that. The very Bill attacks the entire area of support for families. Therefore, there is no reason for us to believe that one particular clause is compassionate while the Bill itself is anything but compassionate.

The Government would have us believe that Clause 5 is there for the benefit of parents of missing children. That is obviously not the reason for this particular clause. It is supposed to eliminate the need for the Government to collect possible overpayments, as was suggested by a previous speaker, in a case where the actual death of a child occurred while the payments were being made. However, although I was not there that particular day, the committee was told by officials from the Department of National Health and Welfare that the present, unamended Act allows the Minister not to collect in such cases. Therefore, for that reason, this particular clause is not at all necessary.