

Family Allowances Act, 1973

Mr. Hawkes: Mr. Speaker, I have made several speeches on this Bill here and in Committee where in I pointed out that of the three parts of the system, the only one which delivers the maximum amount to the poorer segment of society is the Family Allowances part. Therefore, it is the best part of the system. I also point out, Mr. Speaker, that Parliamentarians need to have the facts, to have an open inquiry, and we, as Members of Parliament, should be proposing legislation to the Ministers instead of the other way around, especially in the areas of social policy. That is a much more fundamental democratic principle which, if I have anything to say about it, the next Government will follow, and any Clark Government will follow.

Mr. Ogle: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to direct a question to the former speaker, the Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes). I must say I did not understand his answer to that particular question because it did not seem to be an answer. Nevertheless, I would like to ask about another area because I know he is a serious person and he is seriously thinking of policy.

He criticized the Government for its lack of family policy, and I realize there is not a great deal of time to make a statement to that effect, but I would ask the Hon. Member as a person now, if he were the Minister, taking the situation as it exists in Canada today with such stress on families, the breakdown of traditional family units, the large number of separated families, single parents, a whole new situation, would he make a few remarks about what he would consider to be a good family policy today?

Mr. Hawkes: What a topic, Mr. Speaker! You have to start with an understanding of this nation, its diversity, its large geographic size, and you need to be sensitive to the fact that policies have to be flexible. When you consider northern parts of Provinces, or the Yukon versus a large city like Toronto, you must have systems which are culturally concordant with the lifestyle, geography, and economic situation in which people find themselves in this country.

I believe it behooves a Government at the federal level to be supportive of local communities, local groups, provincial Governments, and so on, in the development of social policies with the view to strengthening family life, single-parent families or the more traditional two-parent family. Federal Governments can provide some moral leadership, support and co-ordinating function, but you do not start by one person in a Cabinet saying: "This is the way it should be for everyone", trying to lay that kind of "trip" on the nation, whether it is in health care or family policy.

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, this is my last opportunity as the New Democratic Party critic on social policy to speak against Bill C-132. I intend, therefore, to summarize the position of the NDP regarding this retrogressive legislation, and refer again to the reasons we so strongly object to the six and five capping on the indexing of Family Allowances. I hope as well to present some positive alternatives which we of the NDP believe would benefit

families and children and which we hope the Government, and indeed all Parties, would consider.

I must also, of course, reiterate our criticism of the Government for introducing such a punitive Bill. This Bill further victimizes families and children who are already suffering a great deal from high unemployment, from the inflated cost of living and, of course, from increasing chronic poverty, a fact which was pointed out just yesterday in this House with reference to the recent studies of the Canadian Council on Social Development. We believe that Bill C-132 erodes the basic principle of universality, the universal social programs which we believe in very strongly, and I will speak to that shortly.

I must for a moment, however, point out once again, following up on the inability of the Hon. Member for Calgary West (Mr. Hawkes) to answer my question about the Tory position on universality, the hypocrisy of the leaderless Tories, who really have no clear economic or social policy to offer Canadians. We had a very good example of that recorded in *Hansard* just a few minutes ago when I asked the Hon. Member for Calgary West about the Conservative position on universality at it applies to Family Allowances. He could not answer, and *Hansard* will substantiate that.

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The Conservative Party supported the Government restraint Bill by voting in favour of Bill C-124, so they are in favour of the whole concept of six and five restraint. We know that very clearly. As I mentioned, they also voted 60 per cent in a survey to dismantle universal Family Allowances. However, we know it is not particularly popular with voters to mention these intentions of the Conservatives in public; therefore, the Conservatives are joining us in public to vote against Bill C-132 as it applies to Family Allowance capping. They do not do this as a matter of principle, Mr. Speaker, but really because they know it would be unpopular to take any other stand.

We have opposed the total six and five restraint program of the Liberal Government because it is unjust, illogical and punitive. The Minister said in her remarks this morning that Bill C-132 should be viewed in the context of the total six and five program. That is certainly the context in which we will be discussing this Bill, and I think it is illogical for the Conservative Party to do otherwise.

The Government, supported by the Conservatives as I just said, introduced and passed Bill C-124 last Spring imposing six and five wage restraint on Public Service workers as an example to all workers in the country. In doing so they took away collective bargaining rights from those same workers. Then they brought in Bill C-133 to reduce indexing on pensions of retired civil servants who had paid into their pension plan themselves and who had every right to expect they would be fully protected against inflation when they retired. Not satisfied with this, the Liberals also brought in Bill C-131, passed last week over the strong opposition of those on this side of the House. That Bill reduced indexing on old age pensions, thus penalizing elderly people in Canada who must pay the full