

Family Allowances Act, 1973

[Translation]

Mrs. Gabrielle Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say a few words at the third reading stage of Bill C-70.

The Bill was debated at length during second reading. It was studied in great detail in committee, and whatever could be said against or in favour of the Bill has already been said. In fact, today is the twenty-ninth day of debate on this piece of legislation.

During the next three years, this Bill and the amendments to the Income Tax Act concerning child benefits will gradually replace the present system with a fairer and a more sensible substitute, while maintaining the basic principle that families with children are entitled to certain benefits that are not available to families without children.

The proposed set of reforms guarantees that the highest after-tax benefits will go to families with the lowest incomes and that payments will be reduced progressively as a family's income increases. That is not the case at the present time, when a family with an income of over \$30,000 receives higher after-tax benefits than a family with an income of \$10,000.

I get the impression that the Opposition, especially the Liberal Opposition, tends to forget that between 1974 and 1984, it supported measures that made a fifty per cent cut in social programs. In 1976, the same Opposition reduced family allowances from \$25 to \$20 per month, reduced and finally eliminated the fifty-dollar child tax deduction in effect at the time, reduced the exemption for children from 16 to 17 years old, and finally, in 1982, the same Opposition capped indexation of family allowances at six and five per cent.

In fact, considering only what happened in 1976, if family allowances had been fully indexed to the consumer price index without interruption from 1974 onward, monthly family allowance payments would have been \$51.83 per child this year, instead of \$31.00 as is now the case.

Now, to the Members of the other Opposition Party who are such staunch defenders of the underprivileged. Did you tell those people about whom you are so concerned—and I am sorry to see the Hon. Member for Vancouver East (Ms. Mitchell) leaving the House now—did you tell those people the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth? Did you explain to them that the purpose of this Bill is indeed to give more money to the poorest among them? Would the Hon. Member for Vancouver East tell me whether she is prepared to go back to her riding this weekend and explain to the head of a single-parent family who earns \$10,000 that, thanks to our new legislation, within five years this parent will have \$250 more to raise his or her family?

Will the Hon. Member for Vancouver East be able to tell the parent that, because he or she will have \$250 more, she will vote against the Bill this evening?

How does one explain this situation?

We have realigned our social policies under other amendments, particularly with respect to the child tax credit. Will Members of the Opposition tell families earning \$10,000 a year that their child tax credit will be \$734 in 1985, \$768 in 1986, \$908 in 1987, \$1,048 in 1989? Did you tell that to your constituents?

If we examine the measures announced by our Government to help families we find that, generally speaking, the child benefit system will be changed somewhat over the next few years, but always to the benefit of poorer Canadians.

I said earlier that our family policy is an employment policy as well. If the father, the mother or the children in that family find work within the coming weeks or months, it will certainly compensate for the missing 94 cents on their monthly allowance cheque. In my opinion, that is more important to a family. Quebec's economy has been steadily recovering. Ever since the election, we have created, in Quebec alone, 136,000 jobs, that is an average of 9,067 jobs per month, compared with a total of 37,000 jobs created by the Liberal administration in 55 months.

It is clear that requests will continue to be made for still more money to help the poor in our society, to improve their living conditions, something we can understand. We fully support this concern for social justice.

The situation of families with children changes constantly. The federal programs designed to help these families cannot always automatically adapt to changing conditions. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to reorient these programs, and that is the purpose of Bill C-70. We believe that we have adopted a realistic and equitable approach and we intend to continue to work in this direction.

Last December 5, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp) announced the creation of a parliamentary task force on child care in Canada, to deal with the future orientation of policies in view of the changing needs of Canadian families. In our development policy, we are offering women, as an example, a labour market promotion and integration program to help them acquire the professional qualifications they need to meet the requirements, for some jobs as well as a practical knowledge of the labour market. In the health caucus, we have been studying for the past few weeks all aspects of poverty. We are concerned about these families and children who are living in poverty in Canada. We have heard experts deal with the subject: Mr. Ken Battle, Executive Director of the National Council on Welfare, Mrs. Sylvia Gold, of the Council on the Status of Women, Senator Brenda Robertson, who is familiar with this issue since she is a former Minister of Health from New Brunswick, the former Minister of Development, and in the coming days, we shall be hearing Mr. Michael Walker of the Fraser Institute in Vancouver. This is what we have been doing to help those who need it the most. In addition, we shall develop other social policies as our economy improves in the future.