

Family Allowances Act, 1973

Members sitting in the House do not realize the significance of this, but I ask them to think for a moment about how they would feel if they had worked hard all their lives raising children and looking after a home, with no pay, no benefits, no pension, and were now being faced with a reduction in the one cheque which comes in their own name.

Mr. Kelly: You are being silly.

Mrs. Mitchell: The Hon. Member says that I am being silly. He should hear from some women across Canada as we have, such as those on the Task Force on Older Women who do not think that this is silly at all. It is very basic from the point of view of women.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mrs. Mitchell: The Family Allowance cheque is of particular significance to women. Increasingly in today's world homemakers and mothers who are in the home full-time or during a good part of their lives receive no recognition, and recognition today is usually in the form of remuneration, unlike it might have been in previous generations. About the only thing they get is a card on Mother's Day and the Family Allowance cheque. To reduce the cost of living by discontinuing the indexing of Family Allowance cheques is a slap in the face to the women of Canada and to full-time mothers. The Liberals in effect are telling mothers that they are not important. In other words, mothers are the ones who can be made to pay for inflation in Canada today. They are telling mothers that they can buy second-hand clothes for their kids at lower cost because they are not going to maintain indexing to keep up with the real cost of living. This is what the Liberals are saying to many mothers and families. It is a callous Liberal Government that says that. There are many other ways the Government could have saved money, and indeed brought money into the coffers, other than by taking this means in a period of recession.

● (1630)

In the future, if our economy improves—if it ever does—I would like to see us consider the possibility of increasing the Family Allowance to an amount which more adequately would recognize the parenting role of a mother or a father in the home. An increased allowance, when we can afford this, could help cover the cost of daycare for a working parent or could be a means for full-time homemakers to pay into the Canada Pension Plan in their own names. We will be debating this point when we get around to the Green Paper on pension reform.

Recently I attended hearings of the New Democratic Party Task Force on Older Women. These hearings were held in every province of Canada. A woman in Fredericton proposed that the monthly Family Allowance should be raised to a minimum of \$200 per family per month so that women could have the choice to remain in the home to care for family members full time and have some financial recognition, not a full wage, but some recognition for this labour. It could also

provide the means for some homemakers to pay into the Canada Pension Plan on their own behalf. For mothers who work it could help to pay for daycare costs. If we believe that children are our greatest resource and that parents should have a choice of how they care for their children, this is indeed a very interesting proposal. One caution in that regard is that we do not want changes which would increase the ghettoizing of women in the home and would further exploit their labour as has traditionally been done in the case of homemakers.

We in this Party believe that we must retain the full Family Allowance, paid monthly, and that a monthly payment is essential for each child. It should increase as soon as the economy can allow for this. In order to finance this universal allowance more equitably, we have a proposal which I did not hear the Minister mention at all, nor did I hear the Hon. Member from the Conservative Party mention it. We propose that the financing of this universal program—and the same thing applies to old age pensions—could be paid for more equitably through a reform in the tax system. The highest income people in society would repay the full amount through a more realistic income tax system. We are opposed absolutely to a means test for Family Allowances for the same reason that we oppose a means test for old age pensions. A means test stigmatizes people. It adds to bureaucratic costs. It is far better to reform the tax system and tax back the allowances from wealthier families while maintaining a universal Family Allowance Program as a right.

Both the old age pension cheques and Family Allowance cheques are not socked away in the bank. The money received from them goes immediately into consumer goods and is recycled within our economy. Indeed, this is a stimulus to small business and certainly helps to maintain jobs. Those allowances are important from an economic point of view as well as a social right.

The NDP stands solidly behind universal social security for Canadians. We fought for adequate pensions, pensions above the poverty line, and we will continue to do so by resisting the imposition of six and five on the basis of the old age pension.

We fought for the right of workers to unemployment insurance and disability coverage. We are proud that we have a Program now. Compare the tragedy we would be in if we were back in the same situation as workers were in the 1930s.

Universal medicare was pioneered by Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan. Medicare is now available to all Canadians. Finally, in 1945 after considerable pressure from the CCF and the labour movement, universal Family Allowances were initiated. These allowances became taxable in 1973, but their being taxable meant that only a portion of the allowance is returned through our income tax system.

We know that the wealthiest people in society pay no income tax at all. That is where the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) can get more money for her restraint program instead of taking the money from the backs of children and families.