

Family Allowances

but it is not a case for a federal-provincial confrontation, as the hon. member would define the situation. It is a federal program, and the government is giving it directly to Canadian families and asking them to lobby their provincial governments to make sure that their elected representatives leave it with their citizens.

If members would follow the development of social policy in this country they would know that the provinces instructed the federal government, through my predecessor two years ago, to explore tax related programs such as this one to help, on a selective basis, groups that are in need. The three groups which were identified specifically around that time as needing help were families with children, including single parent families, people between the ages of 64 to 65 who lose their jobs and can no longer work, and older people. This bill addresses the problems of one of these three groups. The provinces know that, and there is no opposition to it. We all want to see this bill passed and to make sure that it is respected by the provincial welfare programs.

Mr. Epp: Mr. Chairman, I do not wish to interrupt my colleague, but I think it is important that we keep the record straight. The minister has given the impression that we have been sitting in committee of the whole on this bill for a long time and that they have been answering questions. I have reviewed *Hansard*, and on Thursday we spent approximately two hours and 20 minutes on this bill in committee of the whole. On Friday there was a point of privilege raised by the member for Northumberland-Durham immediately after question period, which went through the morning session and into the afternoon session. We started in committee of the whole at 15 20 on Friday afternoon. I was here and wanted to ask questions of the minister. That was my first opportunity. Yesterday we started at 21 25 p.m. I am simply saying that the red herring the minister pulls across the trail that she does not want to answer questions may be true, but her reading of the time is wrong.

● (1632)

The Chairman: Order, please. I think we should drop that question. It is not the way to make progress. It is a point of debate more than anything. I will allow one last question to the hon. member for St. John's East. The hon. member for Athabasca, the hon. member for Cape Breton-East Richmond, and the hon. member for Edmonton West have indicated they want to contribute to the debate.

Mr. McGrath: Mr. Chairman, I want to put this question to the minister once more, and I will ask it as directly and simply as I can. Given the concerns that have already been expressed in this House, by the Anti-Poverty League and others, that the amount of the child tax credit will be deducted from the amounts payable by the provinces and municipalities for welfare, and given the fact that the provincial ministers of welfare, meeting in Nova Scotia in September, complained that there was no consultation, why is the minister proceeding with this bill without a formal commitment from the provinces that

[Miss Bégin.]

they will not allow the amount of the child tax credit to be discounted from the amount payable by welfare.

Miss Bégin: Mr. Chairman, I fail to see why the hon. member repeats three times a question to which I have given the answer. Even on second reading it was quite a long answer. I want to say to the hon. member that even if he opposes the child tax credit, non-taxable, going to mothers in the months of March and April of next year, of \$200 per child if the family makes less than a certain ceiling, I do not oppose that. We are in favour of that on this side. I do not understand the ambiguous position of the hon. member.

This is a federal program that goes directly to the mothers of the country wherever need exists. It is quite urgent that this program be passed by the House, be implemented, and the cheques delivered to the families in order to make sure that the period of waiting time for the mothers of families in need will be as short as possible without them facing a relative deduction in the family allowance.

This has been said often. There will be a reduction in their family allowance cheques in the months of January and February. We would like them to get the new cheque as soon as possible, and that will be in March, but it will more than offset the other loss. It is going to be a net increase of around \$140 per child per year, which means that cheques will go out in the hundreds of dollars for each family in the province of the hon. member because it is an under-privileged and poorer province. That being so, it will benefit from this new money as soon as this bill is passed. I think it is quite clear that this has nothing to do with the federal-provincial mood of the country.

I repeat to the hon. member, who is not listening, that this is a federal program. If it requires provincial adjustment we will be happy to help the provinces to come to an understanding of the new program and make the adjustments.

Mr. Yewchuk: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to have the opportunity to ask the minister a few questions on this important subject. The minister claims she is very concerned about poverty and those people living below the poverty line, yet since the government of which she is a member has been in power, countless mothers live as have mothers of past generations—in a web of poverty. The policies implemented by this government over the past 15 years have not improved the situation at all.

The hidden community of the poor in this country remains in relatively the same state as it has been for some time—victims of circumstances beyond their control, victims of a totally insensitive and poorly informed government about the things that need to be done to correct poverty.

In short, Mr. Chairman, I am concerned and upset by the persistence of widespread poverty in our modern, prosperous society. Depending on which definition you use—I know the Prime Minister chooses to use the definition which makes it look better than it is, but if we take the definition of poverty used by the Senate committee, which I think is the best definition, we see that 20 per cent or more of Canadians are living in conditions of poverty.