

the shuffle. That is what we are discussing today. The family is a bread and butter issue. That is the tone of the presentation of this measure. The family is an issue which calls for discussion and perhaps even for recognition in law as a valuable unit in our society.

● (1720)

Let me point out that it is a long standing and basic policy of the Government of Canada that there be no special proclamation to mark special days or weeks except for fire prevention week in October, a proclamation which dates back to the days of confederation. This is not to say that special proclamation should not be made when the situation merits it. After all, the international community through the auspices of the United Nations has declared a series of international years to mark certain groups deserving of the focus of international attention. There are International Women's Year, the Year of the Child and the Year of the Handicapped, to name a few.

The family is the primary social unit in the organization of Canadian life. Ours is a very complex society in a very complex time, and the basic unit, the family, has been hard-pressed to maintain its traditional role as formative monitor of the existence of the individual. Still, the family has been the primary influence moulding the structure of society since the earliest days of recorded history and, if archaeological evidence is to be admitted, the family has been the primary social unit since people began to live as a community.

But the fact remains that the validity of the family as the basic unit of society has been called into question in recent years by fringe groups, by sociologists, by academics and by disgruntled individuals who have rejected the traditional frameworks without proposing any more worthy substitute. In China almost 400 years before Christ the scholar Mencius wrote: "The root of the kingdom is in the state. The root of the state is in the family". I cannot find fault with this statement. To my mind the family is the root. Family as an entity and as a concept—family *an sich und für sich*.

Still, the family must not be seen in isolation. It must be understood in terms of its surrounding social structures. It is a symbiotic relationship. The family influences its milieu and at the same time is influenced by the milieu. There is a general tendency to see the family as an isolated social unit, almost wholly responsible for its own well being. I disagree with this approach. We must take into account the profound impact which economic, political and other factors have on the lives of families.

I am not sure that the best way to deal with these factors is to name a so-called family week. As the basic unit of society all government activity all year round should be directed at the perpetuation and protection of the concept of family, not necessarily family in the traditional sense but family as a concept of life wherein family members are encouraged to live fully as responsible members in community with each other. We must be willing to accept and respect all forms of family life, but above all we must recognize family. The dictionary

Family Week

meaning may change, but the intrinsic and essential meaning must not.

It is my fear that to name a special week as family week is to pass the family off into the realm of legislative tokenism. A token five days of debate in this House devoted to family-related concerns would take place. A token seven days of publicity and propaganda and a whole new breed of greetings cards to stimulate the economy would occur. Is this to be the hallmark of the Thirty-first Parliament?

While much family-related legislation falls under provincial jurisdiction, this is not to say that the federal government has no role to play in this field. The federal Law Reform Commission published a report on family law reform, recognizing the responsibility of the federal court in this area; but the fact remains that to trespass on provincial jurisdiction is not to fulfil the responsibilities of the federal government but, rather, to usurp responsibilities from other, equally responsible jurisdictions. It strikes me that for the federal government to name a family week is something of an exercise in futility and an indulging of euphemistic tendencies which should have no place in this House.

The role of the federal government, as I see it, is to monitor and encourage provincial initiative in family-related concerns. Any declaration on the part of the government in Ottawa should be construed as a further instance of federal paternalism which is something the provinces have had to deal with for many years but are not prepared to accept any longer.

I am not sure that the interest of the family would be best served by establishing a specific week to that end. Governments the world over recognize the importance of families and are reluctant to allow unnecessary invasions into the privacy of family life. This works both for and against the family unit. As a recognition of the right of the family to its privacy it is an advantage, but incredible inequities exist between the rights of family members in some societies and, because of governmental hesitancy to intrude, the individual has little recourse in law on the international level.

Still, it seems to me that our respect and affection for the family would not be enhanced by having it imposed by government. It seems to me that if our citizens feel the need for still another day on which to pay tribute to the family and its importance to our lives and our society, the initiative should come from them, and let government endorsement follow.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg-Birds Hill): Mr. Speaker, by way of opening my remarks, it never fails to surprise me and half amuse me at the extent to which the government is prepared to use federal-provincial relations as a cover for avoiding addressing the real issue in any given circumstance.

Mr. Knowles: Just like the last government.

Mr. Blaikie: I rise in support of the bill and of the spirit with which I perceive it to have been brought forward for debate in the House. I think it is important at this time, as it would be at any other time, to stress the importance of family life and to think a little more about what we mean when we