

Family Allowances

We also know that even if we talk of free education, it does not really exist. Therefore, in view of the additional costs, which today are enormous, I wonder if the minister would consider the possibility of granting family allowances at least until the age of 21.

An hon. Member: Until 25.

Mr. La Salle: We know that today a large percentage of the students do not complete their studies until 21 and even later. I wonder to what extent we could reasonably ask the minister to consider this possibility. The generous additional income which has been granted and which will be available on January 1 would be more helpful to families if the age limit were raised to 21. After seriously discussing the matter with several of my constituents—instead of making a survey—I believe that they are very much in favour of this and endorse my arguments. They find it quite normal that we should consider the possibility of raising the eligibility age to 21. Of course, we could again consider that as long as the child is at school.

● (1630)

Now, I take the liberty during consideration of this bill—which, once again, I consider very worthwhile and will support most willingly—of asking the minister to consider that possibility.

Also, we ask the minister to increase immediately the allowances to \$20. As I understood the bill introduced by the minister a few months ago which will come into force in January, it does seem that this basic minimum of \$12 will be granted across the country and that the surplus of the general average of \$20 will enable the provinces to grant it to large families or people with inadequate incomes, where the need is greater in their opinion.

I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to say that I am very happy to see that the provinces will be able to adjust the family allowances while respecting first of all the national basis, but with the possibility of adjusting the amount from \$12 to \$20, on the basis of need.

I suggest, as the hon. member for Argenteuil-Deux-Montagnes (Mr. Fox) said earlier, that this respect shown to the provinces, this opportunity granted to them, deserves of course some congratulations to the Minister who understood and accepted it; therefore the provinces that wish to exercise this power will be able to do so provided that they respect first of all the principles established by the federal government.

Therefore, I hope that on January 1st, we will have the opportunity of rising these allowances to an average of \$20, and I understand that if the Minister—I think this is correct—cannot increase or did not deem advisable to increase immediately these allowances to \$20, it is because in January the provinces will have to adjust this amount insofar as they have the authority to do so. And of course, in view of the fact that the \$20 allowance will be taxable in January, it might be inconvenient for the people to receive an amount of \$20 which would be reduced later on the basis of the provincial policy.

I wanted to make these few comments and again repeat these things bringing them to the attention of the Minister in order to know whether the eligibility age might be

[Mr. La Salle.]

raised to 21 for the reasons I referred to earlier. I want to say of course that I am quite in favour of this increase which will be, I am sure, welcome by all the mothers and I hope that the government will not wait as long before considering again the need for an increase in these allowances based on the increase in the cost of living or the cost of services.

In conclusion, I would like also to state that this might be the way we could perhaps manage to increase the birthrate. Of course, it is often argued that there are less children as a result of the very high cost of living today. I think that this is an argument that we should ponder upon.

I could very well get carried away and say that raising allowances from \$12 to \$20, as some others have proposed, is inadequate; I could call for \$30, but I would like to be rather positive and realistic. To the extent that it will be possible for the government to pay allowances directly related to the child and the family, to the extent that we will be able to ensure an adequate income to families, which would alleviate the very great difficulties which we encounter, we will perhaps be able to believe that it will be more tempting for a couple to raise more children.

After all, we know that there are young couples who have many reservations about the difficulties which have beset their parents and about the cost of living in general.

Thus the bill represents an improvement. Can the government or Parliament review it much more frequently? That is quite possible, and I only hope that it will.

Generally speaking, like so many other hon. members I welcome this most acceptable increase and you may be sure that I shall not hesitate at any opportunity given me to reiterate the requests we have to make in order to bring in more relief to the general public.

[English]

Mr. B. Keith Penner (Thunder Bay): Mr. Speaker, I enter this debate only briefly because it is most important to pass quickly this measure which will increase family allowances and get some extra cash into the hands of mothers who are facing rather substantial rises in costs this fall, particularly for food but also for clothing which their children require as they return to school.

That there is an urgent need for these additional consumer dollars, there is no doubt. This is especially true where the wage earner is not in a strong position to bargain for pay increases which would help him and his family to meet the rising cost of living. Unfortunately, there are still too many people in Canada who are not in a strong bargaining position. Others, the average Canadian worker, have not only been able to keep up, but in many cases to get ahead of the increases in the consumer price index.

Some statistics have recently come to my attention which show that during the period 1969 to 1972, the average weekly earnings of Canadian workers, and this is indicated by the industrial composite, increased by an annual average of 8 per cent. That is more than twice the rise in the consumer price index. The quarterly change for the first quarter of 1973 over the last quarter of 1972 indicates a rise in the wage earnings of 2.3 per cent compared with a 1.9 per cent rise in the consumer price