

Family Allowances

citizens and, on another standpoint, the sharp increase in the cost of living. This required the perseverance and aggressiveness of my party. It also required, from the Liberals who are whispering during my speech, the fear of losing power or, and this amounts to the same thing, the fear of breaking this almost anachronistic "flirt" they are entertaining since October 30 last with the NDP. All this was required for the Liberals to change their mind and to introduce this bill. The long delays, the government's hesitations, the discussions—

Mr. Guay (Levis): The discussions—

Mr. Wagner:—the discussions, yes, as the hon. member for Lévis (Mr. Guay) just stated, the demagogic and never-ending discussions about amending the family allowances were so many factors which seemed to occupy much of the time of fathers and mothers. This has not been a waste of time since finally the House is studying a bill aimed at improving the present living conditions and which will better take into account the family needs.

Bill C-211, which does not originate with the Liberal party, will be a Canadian government's bill which will be passed by the Canadian Parliament—

An hon. Member: Thanks to the Liberals!

Mr. Wagner:—representing all Canadian parties. The credit will not solely be taken by the Liberal members, as now suggested by a member. This bill is incorporated in an integrated social policy eagerly sought by all and now seriously initiated.

The formulation of the bill now under consideration indicates for once—and it is the exception which proves the general rule—a flexibility of the central government regarding its provincial counterparts. Henceforth, may it be likewise in every field, whether the energy policy is concerned, whether it is some concerted action against that calamity called unemployment or again an effective fight—which is still awaited—against the most important current problem, that is inflation.

The federal-provincial agreement which has been concluded in that respect must not however lull us at the federal level concerning the deep yearnings of the provincial governments, especially the determination of several premiers to take part in the elaboration of socio-economic measures dealing directly with their priorities. We should not think for example, that Quebec, having accepted Bill C-211, has forgotten the spirit of its interventions in Victoria in June 1971.

● (1630)

To believe it would be to bury one's head in the sand and sooner or later be in danger of being bitterly disappointed. Besides, have we not heard lately the outgoing premier of Quebec decide to reopen the Victoria file, if he were given the opportunity, and I hope that the federal government will eagerly welcome his desire.

Mr. Speaker, on another level, being universal and taxable the allowances plainly seem to be intended to serve first the families that need it most. However, let us not believe that the bill amounts to a decisive stroke in the

great challenge of the fight against poverty. We know, for example, that according to Statistics Canada, in 1969 already the average debts of the family in Canada was \$4161; if necessary we shall read again the 1973 message of the bishops of Canada on our social inequities. We will remember it and will have to notice that the continued increase in the cost of living, unfortunately left without any serious solution from the present government, affects all social classes but more seriously those at the lower echelons in our society.

Basically, the increases provided by Bill C-211 do nothing more than correct the social injustice suffered by low and average income families as a result of inflation which, it seems, benefits the richest people in our consumer society. Besides, Canadians remain sceptical about the socio-economic initiatives of the present government. A Gallup poll published last June—my friends need not worry, I am not referring to the Gallup poll showing the rising popularity of the Progressive Conservative party and the lowering of the popularity of the Liberal party, but to the Gallup poll showing that most Canadians foresee that prices will rise quicker than family income. In fact, 85 per cent of the Canadians then interviewed foresaw that, in 1974, prices would rise much more quickly than family incomes. At that rate, Mr. Speaker, because of its inertia against inflation, this government seems willing to admit that they are absolutely right.

Therefore, Bill C-211, despite the value of its structure, despite also the new gross gains that it will bring to families, does not even deal with the problems of the struggle against poverty, the shocking increase in food, clothing and housing prices. Of course—I will admit it readily—the legislation could not solve everything at once, and at least it does constitute a concrete measure to remedy, partly at least, the inadequacy of the net income of needier families. So, Bill C-211 is a limited measure aiming at changing the situation imposed on the family. The area of family policy is much greater and more complex, especially at a time when an ever growing number of women are forced, for lack of money, to get back on the labour market. Let us note here that one third of all Quebec women at work have children under 10. Together with the provinces, if not through their initiative, since this is their responsibility under the constitution, we shall have to tackle the definition and development of a genuine family policy. Among other sources, Quebec family organizations and especially the Richelieu-Yamaska Family Council, whose headquarters are in Saint-Hyacinthe, have already introduced very appropriate recommendations for the establishment of a real family policy. Suffice it to mention here the need for more and fuller medical services in poor neighbourhoods and in outlying areas, the need for assistance services for married couples and families, the urgent need for a wider distribution of family planning information, easy access for all to family recreational activities, especially since the whole question of the urgency of a family housing policy is closely related to federal responsibility. On this last point, the failure of the present government to take action concerning the present interest rates is seriously affecting low or medium income families.

Mr. Speaker, those are some of the things that we should all keep in mind if we really want to solve the true