

Family Allowances

interest and all charges included, which was not the case before. The complete system is geared toward sending out the cheques as soon as possible, and we hope to be able to start sending them out perhaps as early as the third week of March to the most needy mothers who do not file income tax returns.

The last point concerns tax forms. The hon. member referred to clause 5 which amends the old section 152 of the act. We are still working on the form. As I understand the situation, under the Income Tax Act the wording of the taxation form is prescribed by the Minister of National Revenue. We are working on a new form which we want to be as simple as possible. I hope it can be a one-page form which would follow the requirements of the Income Tax Act and at the same time provide us with whatever information is required.

Let me just go back to what I was saying under the heading of status of women. In the case of a family with two parents, the mother will fill out the form and ask the husband for his signature because both signatures will be required. Either parent will be able to fill out the form, but in all cases where there are two parents the two signatures will be necessary. I think this answers the questions put by the hon. member.

Miss MacDonald: Mr. Chairman, I notice that the minister said earlier that she would avoid answering questions based on moral grounds. I want to say to her that I consider the principle embodied in this bill to be totally immoral. I am talking about the rebate being based on family income. That principle, as the minister should very well know, she of all people in the House, is discriminatory against women. This is something which the minister has not really faced in her detailed answers to the various points that were raised. This principle is highly discriminatory against women.

She must recognize that in the legislation before us women are penalized. That is not new to the minister. She has heard me speak on this before in connection with other pieces of legislation which have been brought in by the government and which in fact she herself put forward. Not long ago I raised that question in the debate on the spouse's allowance. The kind of discrimination I am talking about here is the kind which takes away the sense of self-worth that a woman has as an individual in our society every time she must seek the approval of the older spouse—which, as the minister knows, in most cases is the man—to get the spouse's allowance. That is discrimination against women. This legislation discriminates against women also and it is contrary to the Human Rights Act.

The minister made reference to the letter which my colleague, the hon. member for St. John's East, read into the record, the letter from Mr. Fairweather, the head of the Human Rights Commission. The minister indicated that this was the first time the subject had been brought up. Also she indicated that his presentation was not valid. That is not the first time it has been brought up. This point was raised with Mr. Fairweather, the whole approach of rebating or taking into consideration the concept of family income as some kind of a basis. It has been raised repeatedly with the Human

[Miss Bégin.]

Rights Commissioner by women's groups, individual women and individual members of parliament.

● (2112)

I should like to refer to one occasion when it was raised with the Human Rights Commissioner not long ago. The distinguished former chairman of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, Senator Florence Bird, raised this issue with the Human Rights Commissioner before the special joint committee on the constitution. In reply he said the following:

I would be unhappy about a formula based on marriage. You know, we are over the days whether women have a right to work or not. 3.5 million women in this country work, and a quick answer would be that if a formula for eligibility is based merely on marital status, I think it is contrary to the Canadian Human Rights Act.

He went on to say:

Women have the right to work and marital status in itself should not be used as an excuse for a different formulation.

I have put on record the question raised by the former commissioner of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, as well as the reply of the present commissioner of the Human Rights Commission, because they were both very concerned about this particular aspect. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Consumer and Corporate Affairs said yesterday that she was delighted people here had suddenly found the report of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. I am sure the minister knows that there were some of us, including herself, who were involved in the writing of that commission report.

One of the things being fought for seven years ago, and again now, was equality for women in this country. This bill begins a regressive step toward that equality. The principle embodied in the bill is discriminatory, but it is also very regressive. It makes me extremely concerned and unhappy that this kind of legislation has to be introduced into the House.

I would think the minister herself must be very uncomfortable with this kind of legislation. I am sure she will appreciate that the entire thrust of the drive for equality of women in the past decade has been based on erasing the assumption that a woman is an extension of her husband. That is what the drive for equality has been all about, that a woman can be considered independent in her own right whether in the marriage unit or outside it.

This proposal puts her back into a dependent situation. It is no longer a question of having erased the assumption that she is dependent on her husband. The fact that her income is seen as an extension of her husband's income makes her a dependent in that category. For that reason I am concerned and upset that the minister, of all people in the House, should be lending her support to this aspect of legislation which is terribly regressive.

The minister will know that the ongoing reform to legislation at both provincial and federal levels, as well as the entire thrust of sections of the Law Reform Commission in the past decade, has been focused on reforming laws which discriminate against women, particularly women in the marriage unit.