

Family Allowances

This measure may be regarded as the thin end of the wedge, which will have to be steadily expanded. When we recall that to-day 50 per cent of the production of the nation is going for war purposes, then I think we can realize how greatly the purchasing power of the people of Canada will have to be expanded if we are to provide markets for the total production of the nation after the war.

We agree wholeheartedly with the point raised by the hon. member for North Battleford (Mrs. Nielsen) in connection with allowances being paid to wives instead of to husbands. However, the discussion of that and other points I shall leave until we reach the committee stage.

Mr. J. ARMAND CHOQUETTE (Stanstead) (Translation): Mr. Speaker, in a speech which I made in this house on February 3 last, I reminded the government of the need of helping Canadian families whom economic conditions, more especially in peace time, prevent from giving their children proper care and education.

At the time, I said:

That is why we, the supporters of the Bloc Populaire, have included family allowances in our programme.

And referring to the speech from the throne in which the government announced it would introduce family allowances I added:

But let there be no infringement on the rights of the provinces because we hold autonomy as a sacred right.

We are against centralization. And, according to the spirit and letter of the British North America Act of 1867, these matters, for historical reasons known to all, come under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces.

Well, bill 161 (in sections 4, 5, 6 and subsections 2 and 10 of section 8) clearly sets forth the dominion government's absolute control over family allowances. It is granted the sole administration and distribution of these benefits. Under the provisions of this bill, the federal government alone will have the power of settling the terms of payment. People who might consider themselves wronged are prevented from appealing to ordinary courts, whether provincial or federal.

The proposed plan, moreover, empowers this government to interfere in a roundabout way with our provincial educational system, for subsection 2 of section 4 indirectly sets up compulsory education.

We were entitled to expect that the proposal would at least grant equal subsidies to all children; better still, one might have thought that, in order to remedy present inequalities,

[Mr. Quelch.]

the government would provide a scale of allowances rising in proportion to the number of children, that the allowance would be smaller for the first few because the head of the family is generally in a position to support them at least partially. Well, the proposed scheme works quite the opposite way. It grants the full amount to the first four children and then progressively reduces the scale of payments for the others. The Rev. Father Lebel, S.J., general chaplain of the Catholic Farmers' Union, who has investigated this question for a number of years, writes as follows in *La Terre de Chez Nous*, issue of July 19, 1944. I quote from an article entitled "Equality or Inequality":

It follows that all the children of medium-sized Canadian families who, as a rule, could do without the allowances, will receive, in the course of a period of 192 months, during which they will be entitled to the payments, a sum of \$1,188. In large families, the fifth child will get \$192 less, or \$996; the sixth and seventh will have their grants reduced by \$384 and will receive only \$804. As for the eighth and other children, their allowances will be less than half that of the first four, that is \$576.

This is indeed an extraordinary way of understanding the equality of opportunity. One might even wonder whether the excerpt quoted at the beginning of the article is not a typographical error, meaning inequality of opportunity instead of "equality" as printed. Indeed, in view of the above figures, the equality of opportunity referred to in the resolution becomes a lurid joke which will surely not be appreciated by the heads of large families in the various Canadian constituencies and racial groups, especially in the agricultural class where a family of more than five children is just about the average.

The heads of large families will have the more reason to find this joke rather galling, because they realize the weight of the tax burden imposed on them by the dominion government in opposition to the principle of distributive justice. All theologians, philosophers and sociologists contend that distributive justice demand that the legislator distribute taxes for the financial administration of the state according to the paying capacity of every citizen. On the other hand, it is evident that, for similar incomes, the citizen with no dependents enjoys greater resources than the head of a large family, who, however, is bearing the heaviest burden of consumer taxes.

Many of the countries which have established the allowance system, have adopted a uniform rate, but a majority of them have thought it preferable to set a progressive rate which sociologists have no difficulty to justify by adducing sound reasons:

"The family allowance", they say, "is a remuneration whose purpose is to help heads of families to fulfil their duties toward their children when they do not have enough resources to do so properly and to the advantage of society.

"Now, the income of heads of families is generally sufficient to provide for the needs of the first children. That is why, in certain countries, the first and sometimes the second child have been excluded as regards the payment of the allowances.