

Family Income Security Plan

Mr. Valade: I don't intend to be lead into digressions by such inept remarks.

If the hon. member for Papineau, who represents a Montreal riding, had any sense of responsibility to discuss the merits of this bill, I believe he would have better chances to be assessed more favourably when the next elections come around and he would not bring out in this House the nonsense he just gave us.

Mr. Ouellet: I can go and discuss it at any time in your riding.

Mr. Valade: Mr. Speaker, I believe I have the floor and I intend to take advantage of it whether or not it pleases the parliamentary secretary who is far more adept at writing in newspapers than at making speeches in the House.

I want to say, Mr. Speaker, that it is the duty of members to express in the House, where bills are passed, their own opinions and especially their feelings and concern about the people and about a bill which is extremely complex and seems to give something while in fact it withdraws more than it brings. I feel that it is our duty, regardless of our party loyalties, to speak up the truth.

Mr. Speaker, I shall limit myself to the merits of the bill. Personally, I believe the government, instead of making a further amendment to the Family Allowances Act, should first of all have recognized that jurisdiction for family allowances was claimed by the provinces. That, in my opinion, is another violation of the Constitution which stipulates that administration of public health is exclusively a provincial field.

If the government wanted to amend the Family Allowance Act, it should first have tried to come to an agreement with the provinces, to establish whether they want to exercise that responsibility themselves or relinquish it to the federal government.

There again I consider that the government has acted without consultation. It has in fact once more taken the initiative to force upon the provinces legislation which would be better administered by them.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to discuss the substance of Bill C-170. Interruptions have caused me to digress somewhat from this subject, but I want to get back to it, because I think it is more important to discuss the merits of a piece of legislation than to indulge in political or partisan considerations.

Having said so, I think that if we seriously analyze the impact of Bill C-170, there is cause for some concern. No member has raised this point, I think, and this is why I have decided to speak on it.

If we consider the changes that this bill introduces into the family allowance program, I think that we must ask very sincerely whether the government is not seeking a systematic, gradual and definite elimination of all forms of family allowances, for two reasons.

First, as a result of the selectivity principle, and then, as a result of inflation. The selectivity principle obviously reduces more and more the number of family allowance recipients. The government itself admitted it; over 1 million people will no longer be eligible to family allowances.

As a result of inflation, wages and prices tend to increase. The minimum floor on which these new allowances were based will undoubtedly disappear, that is to say that the basic amount of \$4,500 which made a parent with one child eligible, will no longer apply, since, because of inflation, a person who earns \$4,500 now, will probably earn \$6,000 or \$7,000 within three, four or five years. And then, a single child will no longer be eligible to family allowances. This means that, in a few years, through the technocratic process related to this bill, most families, maybe all of them, will no longer be eligible to family allowances.

Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare seems to disagree. This section on page 6 of the bill is very clear about it. It is clearly stated in section 6(1)(b) that allowances will be paid to a person with one child and that, for each full \$100 of income by which the income of the family exceeds, the allowance will be reduced by 33 per cent.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, every person earning \$4,600 will be obliged to deduct 33 per cent from the amount exceeding \$4,500. Who can say, nowadays, that the head of a family who earns \$5,000 has a salary enabling him to make ends meet? In my opinion, it is only fancy.

This is another method which the present government uses to show that he is trying to help the poor, the low income people, the families who need it, but actually, it is only playing a hypocritical game which tend to reduce even more the assistance that large families and low income people need so badly, nowadays.

If the intention is really to do away with family allowances by circuitous means, the present government should have the courage to say outright that it wants to be rid of the burden of helping small wage-earners and large families.

I suggest that the inadequacies of this legislation are evident. Because of the two conditions explicitly stipulated therein, the concept of selectivity and the 33 per cent deductibility clause for each additional \$100 of income over \$4,500, the legislation clearly indicates that we are going toward complete elimination of family allowances to large families and small wage-earners.

If the government wanted to be really honest, it would state outright its intention of abolishing in the near future legislation assisting large families and it should truly demonstrate its intention to help small wage-earners through the use, as all hon. members suggested, of the income tax.

I feel, Mr. Speaker, that it would be easy for the government to say: We want to help families and small wage-earners. We are going to allow low-income family heads to deduct from their income tax all expenses made for their children. Why should the government not allow deductions of clothing expenses for a child under 16 years of age, of all school fees for children under 16, of medical expenses, of physical development expenses, and even of expenses made for sports which are necessary to the training of young people? This would really be a way for the government to prove its sincerity and its truthfulness to the Canadian people.