

Family Income Security Plan

I take it that in putting this motion the hon. member is endeavouring to obtain some assurance that in fact the mother will receive payment. For the reasons I have stated, I do not believe this is necessary. I also think it raises some difficulty because as I understand the hon. member's motion the payment would be made to "the female parent except in any case where the female parent may be considered disqualified by reason of infirmity, ill health, improvidence or other reasonable cause or in any case where other special circumstances or reasonable cause of any kind may so require."

This is a very subjective kind of criteria. It is difficult to determine when a mother would be disqualified in such circumstances. For instance, the word "improvident" could cover a very wide area, depending on the attitude of the person who made the decision. We prefer the present wording because of the basic underlying assurance that the regulations will provide for payment to the mother. Of course, in circumstances where the child may not be with the natural parents but is with relatives, adoptive parents or somebody else who is responsible for the care and custody of the child, then the payment can be made to that particular person. The present wording permits a degree of flexibility.

I hope the hon. member will reconsider his motion in view of what I have said and in view of the high degree of flexibility required in order to permit the plan's administration to substitute for the mother, even for a temporary period, the person who has the actual care and custody of the child. For these reasons, I feel that this motion is not necessary and creates difficulty which I am sure the hon. member would not find desirable.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, when this point was raised in the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs one of the responses that we were given was that the wording of the act was neutral. The question was put to us whether it would not be better to be neutral than to discriminate in favour of a person of either sex. To underline what I mean, the phrase in the bill before us reads as follows: "parent" in relation to a child means an individual who has, in fact, the custody and control of the child.

That, I submit, Sir, is a very plausible argument in this day of equality between the sexes. We were also assured in the committee, as we have been assured now, that the normal practice will be for the cheque to be made out to the mother. Not only were we given the assurance that this would be done but we were told that as with respect to the present Family Allowances Act it would be covered by regulation. We all know that regulations passed under statutes are just as much law as the statutes themselves. Therefore, at some point it is going to become part of the law that the normal course will be for FISP cheques to be made out to the mother. I therefore support the contention of the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall). This same point was made in committee by my colleague, the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), that the act itself is the place where it should be said that the cheque should normally go to the mother.

I appreciate the point that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) made about the subject-

[Mr. Munro.]

tive judgments that might have to be made because of the wording of the amendment proposed by the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe. I suggest that the answer to that would be to propose an amendment to the motion and I suggest that the minister propose it. He has a staff with him this morning and they could draft it fairly quickly. All that is needed is a very simple statement that the cheque will normally go to the female parent, perhaps with a proviso that, where special circumstances or reasonable cause of any kind require another course to be taken, that other course will be followed.

There is no point in my trying to move the amendment and getting us locked into procedural difficulties. This kind of thing gets through only if the minister is prepared to accept it. I would hope he would consider it. Instead of just asking the hon. member who moved the motion to withdraw it, I would hope he would propose an alternative wording, perhaps the very wording that is already in mind for the regulations. All the hon. member is asking, and we support him, is that the provision that these cheques should normally go to the mother be in the act itself rather than just in the regulations.

Mr. Speaker: Is the House ready for the question? The hon. member for Simcoe North.

Mr. P. B. Rynard (Simcoe North): Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) a question. He says that payment might go to relatives or to someone else—

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member will appreciate that we are not in committee. Perhaps the House might allow the hon. member to ask the question of the minister and assume that the minister still has the floor. I think all hon. members have to be reminded that we are not in committee. The minister can speak only once but we might assume that the minister still has the floor. The hon. member might ask the question and the minister might reply, but certainly there has to be order and we have to follow the rules to some extent.

• (1120)

Mr. Rynard: Mr. Speaker, I am concerned about how these allowances would be paid in cases where both parents are either gone or disabled and unable to look after the child and the child is in the care of an uncle, aunt, or other relative. Why was the public trustee not specifically mentioned in this bill as one who might look after such a child?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. The minister will be recognized with the consent of the House. Hon. members should bear in mind that we are not in committee. Hon. members ought to ask these questions before the minister finishes, because he cannot speak a second time.

Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, I see the hon. member's point but I would wish to check into it further. I believe the situation is as I explained it. Under the present wording of the bill there is, in certain circumstances, a good deal of flexibility with respect to the care and control of the child, if that care and control is in the hands of a relative or some other person. In other words, if a relative or some