

*Family Allowances*

abolished. The matter is debatable, but let no one say nor suggest what is not true.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, as far as monthly payments are concerned, the hon. member says that the yearly lump sum should be spread in equal payments over a full year. I simply want to emphasize that if he listened to or read the speech of the minister he should know that she clearly stated that in future, if the beneficiaries so wish, we are prepared to consider giving this single payment provided in Bill C-10 in several instalments.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should not try to attribute bad intentions—which I cannot indeed clearly identify since he took care not to substantiate his charges—to the minister, the government and its members, but he should try rather to make constructive suggestions and recommendations, to which we would listen with interest at the committee stage or elsewhere, so as to improve the technical aspects of this bill.

In this regard, beyond the technical aspects of this bill, which only applies the technical principle of redistribution, the hon. member asked quite appropriately whether we are not taking new sums within the budget of the federal government to give relatively higher amounts under this program than in the past. I think he is right.

However, he is quite wrong to jump to conclusions and say that we do not want to do more, Mr. Speaker. History has shown us, and again quite recently—and when I say recently I go back perhaps two or three years—that this government has taken very serious steps in co-operation with the provinces to try to implement a guaranteed annual income program on a new basis, by trying to rationalize the multiplicity of existing programs and to replace the disgrace that some people still associate with social assistance by a fairer system which can help all those Canadians who, for one reason or another, must at a certain time in their life ask the government to help them out.

Mr. Speaker, the word “request”, I think, is important. Some have seen in the amendments proposed by the minister an unhealthy shift from the previous universal system without a means test to a system under which those recipients who are entitled to a lump sum payment will have to make a formal request in January when they receive their monthly cheque. I think that point should be seriously considered beyond the scope of Bill C-10.

As I said earlier, Bill C-10 is an attempt at redistribution and should not be considered as a new philosophy in social security. I want to be quite clear about that. It is not because we do something, perhaps not very much, for groups of have-nots that we should not seek ways of doing better. In that respect, I feel the House and our governments generally must by all means bring their efforts to bear on a rationalization of social services in Canada and, particularly, income support.

● (1642)

I would like to encourage the minister to continue that effort with her provincial counterparts in order to try and revive what was, for some time, an almost tangible hope to implement at last a universal guaranteed income support system in Canada. That would make it at last possible to get rid of that “odiousness” I was referring to earlier and which is attached to some of our social measures and some of our current social programs. It would also make it possible, in cooperation with other government levels, to allocate most of the funds to those who really need them and thus avoid wastage in complex administrations.

In that respect, I believe the system which had then been proposed, the negative income tax, was a step in the right direction. Had there been agreement, it would surely have made it possible to set up swiftly such a system and thus enable us to steer clear of complicated processes to achieve what we are trying to do with Bill C-10, namely redistribution. In this context, this redistribution is made through a central system, the Department of National Revenue. Unfortunately, again, circumstances beyond our will to social reform prevented us from reaching an agreement on the new program, and obviously we are still trying to use the tools at our disposal to redistribute the money to those who need it most. Such is the purpose of Bill C-10. This bill is based on such a redistribution purpose. It is not a new social policy, or at least I do not consider it as such. It is an attempt, a commendable attempt, as several hon. members put it, in a difficult economic context.

When I refer to a difficult economic context it is not in the same spirit as the hon. member for Broadview did earlier when he rejected the whole society and our economic system. That is not my own view, Mr. Speaker. The fact is, and you just need to look at the situation on the global level, that so-called western societies are presently facing serious economic problems. In such a context, there is always a danger that social programs will be affected by the inhibitive reflex in our political leaders that such a situation will necessarily cause.

I should commend the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) for having stood her ground, and particularly for having convinced her colleagues to resist the temptation that was probably very strong to cut our social programs for which the Liberal party has been fighting for the last 20 or 25 years. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that I am proud of those social programs and that will to help shown by the Liberal party and successive Liberal governments. Here again, it should be kept in mind that most assistance measures we now have were introduced by this party, by these governments.

As I said, Bill C-10, in the context of fiscal restraints announced in August, includes what might be called a necessary evil, a reduction in the traditional category of monthly payments under the universal system of family allowances. Although that reduction may understandably create significant hardships for certain families and beneficiaries who have