

Supply—Health and Welfare

exists in that area. Granted it is not a very large area and it does not contain a great many people, but it has already affected at least 130 children and before long, it will have affected a great many more.

I believe this is important. I do not know why any Canadian child should be barred from the family allowance, particularly when its parents are at the very bottom of the economic scale.

I have no objection to a means test for family allowances providing it is put in the right place. For instance, I would have no objection if it applied to persons in receipt of an income of \$50,000 a year, and if they had to fulfil certain stipulations; but to impose it on this group of people is something I cannot tolerate, particularly when one hears hon. members saying from time to time that we should give more money to Burma or other countries under the various plans we have. When we do give away money it is without strings attached. We do not say that someone has to provide \$5 before we will give them \$25 million. I think we should do something about seeing that our own people in this country are protected, particularly those who are in severe need.

I spoke about children who had to go home from school, according to the new regional director. I spoke to this young man, and he is a very decent fellow. He told me he has to adhere to the act as it is written, and I agreed that he does. The only reason family allowances were paid before was because the regional director winked at some of the regulations. One of them was that the family allowances cheque must be paid directly to the parents.

In effect the mission in that area is the guardian of the children for at least 10 months of the year and frequently for longer periods of time. The result is that, in order to make this thing work, the money has to be paid direct to the mission. As a matter of fact the same gentleman went out and was going to have the former head priest Father Gagnon thrown into jail because he was collecting the cheques at the post office at Ile a la Crosse, despite the fact that the parents would be required to travel many miles to get the cheques and could not read them when they were received, because most of them are quite illiterate.

These things are not taken into account by the officials. Their thinking and the act itself is based on the assumption that in its administration one would be dealing with people of normal intelligence and education. The directives they have issued are useless, because they have no foundation in fact.

I said a minute ago that I would give the details of a few of these cases so the committee will have some idea of the impact this has had upon these people. Here is a letter from a person who has enough education to write a letter:

Please if you going any time to Regina and please ask for me to Mr. G. P. Allen, regional director family allowances, ask him what for didn't send family allowance to my kids since seven months. Now ask him please to send all that to my wife Vitalin Gardiner.

And later:

I got a big family; I got seven kids keeping at my home and very pleasure to you if you can get that for my wife please.

That is from one who knows how to write. To insist that these people sign their cheques is to insist on something impossible because they just cannot do it. They just mark them. They have authorized the priest at the mission to get their family allowance cheques from the post office. That has always worked. The mission books are open to inspection by anybody, and the provincial inspector of schools tells me that he inspects the books regularly and has found them to be in first class order. They keep an account for each child, and if clothing has to be bought it is bought out of the family allowance.

What must be taken into account is that these people do not have banks, they cannot read or write, and an act passed for other parts of Canada just will not work in that part of the country. You are making these people break the law, and they have different ideas about what breaking the law is than have people in other parts of the country. They do not think they are breaking the law by turning in their cheques and having their families go to school. I shall just read excerpts from what another lady writes:

I am a poor widow and often I go to the post office looking for my family allowance cheque which has not come for many months, and all I get is questionnaires and objections and over-payments, etc. It really looks as if it was a crime to put a child in an orphanage or a boarding school and that I have to be punished for it. I shall do my best once more to answer your questions and that I may finally receive some of the money I need so much.

This is what she had in mind. The regional director sent out this questionnaire to these people. I told him when he was here that it was a waste of time, because they could not read it when they got it. How could they fill it out? The first question is "Name of school or institution" and the next one "List of payments made to school or institution since admission". Those would be made largely by the priest at the mission. Then the next, "Show travelling costs paid