

be suffered if one makes a mistake or files a wrong application. So the whole thing, compared to the simple plan we have, is such a hodge-podge of complications that for the minister to stand up here today and say we are making a mountain out of a molehill suggests he has not read the bill. Perhaps I should not say that because I am sure he has read the bill, but I wonder if he has read it, not just with an eye to understanding it as a lawyer and an intelligent person versed in these things but with any attempt to understand what it will mean to the ordinary people of this country.

I come back to what I said at the start of this part of my remarks. I deny completely the minister's suggestion that we are voting against an increase in family allowances. I say we are voting against the strings that are attached to it. One of the most serious strings attached to this whole measure is, indeed, this complicated structure and grotesque array of conditions that people have to meet. This will spoil the legislation. I suggest that within three years—

Mr. Gibson: It is humanitarian.

An hon. Member: Oh, be quiet.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): All I can say to the hon. member for Hamilton-Wentworth (Mr. Gibson) is that his father was a smarter man. He was here in 1944 and supported the principle of universality.

An hon. Member: He also knew when to keep quiet.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Is the hon. member rising on a point of order?

Mr. Gibson: I think it is unfair for my friend to refer to paternity. I would have to be as old as Methuselah to have any knowledge of his father, so I do not think it is a fair comparison.

Mr. Peters: He knew yours, but he sometimes wonders about him now.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I can tell the hon. member, in case he is not aware of it, that his father was not only a member of the House in 1944 who voted for the Family Allowance Act; he was also a member of the King government that brought it in. I hope the hon. member does not feel he has a question of privilege when I say that his father was a smarter man than he is.

I said that our opposition to this bill is not against the increases it contains but against the strings that are attached to it. The second string attached to this bill is the terrible uncertainty which hangs over it as to the amount which people will receive. They will have no idea of that amount, partly because of the complicated structure to which I have made a few references and partly because under the bill it is left to the government to change the amounts any time it wants, or make certain other changes in the legislation.

It is true there is a provision in the bill about the necessity of bringing these things before parliament for one of these affirmative or negative votes, and I am not sure which it is at the moment. The whole question of whether there will be any increase in the amount of the

Family Income Security Plan

allowances to keep pace with the rise in the cost of living, or to keep pace with other conditions that might make further increases necessary, is not in the hands of parliament but in the hands of the government. It is that kind of uncertainty that we feel is a string which should not be attached to these allowances.

Now, Sir, without following any particular order I come to the string in respect of this bill that bothers me most of all, and it is the reason why I have reached the point where, along with my colleagues, I have to say no. The reason I must say no is that there is a string attached to these increases which makes it necessary that those who get them must wear the badge of poverty. The government can talk all it wants about this being an anti-poverty measure, but the fact of the matter is that in order to get the benefits under this legislation people have to parade, declare and assert their poverty. I say this is no way to get rid of poverty. We have had far too much of this in Canada and in some other western countries, where we make handouts to people because they are poor.

• (1700)

The fact is that we should be providing the means for a decent standard of living for people because they are people, the way in which we did it under the Old Age Security Act, before this government messed it up, and in the way we have been doing it over the years under the Family Allowances Act. But now the government proposes that the allowance to be made available for the support of children is not to be made available because children are children. It is to be made available to those on whom we place the badge of poverty. That is a string we do not accept and that is why we are opposed to this bill in its present form. That is why I think this minister ought to use the common sense he has left and take it back to cabinet and to his research people and ask them to redraw the bill in the simpler terms we have had since 1944.

Another string attached to this proposed increase in family allowances is one that came out in the speech the minister made this afternoon. He says the whole purpose of this approach of the government is to redistribute our social welfare dollars to make sure that they go not to those who do not need them but to those who do. That would be a plausible argument if it were not being made by a government which has done the very opposite. It has done nothing toward redistributing the wealth of this country. In fact, the approach in this bill and in the tax legislation in particular has been one to redistribute the wealth of this country in favour of the wealthy. The minister stands here with all of the charm of which he is capable and says we must not give any advantage to the wealthy. Was he around in this House or in cabinet when the present Minister of National Defence (Mr. Benson) was putting through the income tax legislation last year? Is he not aware that in that bill we gave to the wealthy infinitely more than we are giving to the poor, and infinitely more than we are taking away from the wealthy by taking away their family allowances?

Mr. Munro: We took one million off the tax rolls at the lower levels.