

*Family Allowances*

thoroughly agree with her, that for the provinces to take away any of the money which is being directed under the legislation to families in this country would be to defeat its purposes. I say to the minister that if her colleague the Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce permits a change in the computation of the consumer price index such that Canadian families do not get the indexation they ought to get in 1980 or 1981, it will be just as great a disservice.

I recognize that for the population as a whole changes have to be made in the consumer price index, maybe for statistical purposes, but surely for families with growing children to which food and clothing are so important, and also for older people, there is room for a special index. I do not know whether the minister has become familiar with this issue in the time she has been with the department; I know I placed the matter before her predecessor and I hope she will have something to say about it.

I move on to the question raised by the hon. member for St. John's East on the basis of the letter written to the Minister of Finance by Mr. Fairweather. I want to express the hope that the hon. lady will make the position clearer as time goes on. I have been reading the bill and reading Mr. Fairweather's letter, and I must say I am still trying to figure it out. If all that is happening in the bill is that a woman who is legally married is required to file a return jointly with her husband, whereas a woman who is living common law does not need to do so, then I do not see that as serious. But if there is a difference in the total income they report, if, for example, a legally married woman has to report the total income coming into a house whereas a woman who is not legally married does not have to do so, and therefore gets more, it seems to me that Mr. Fairweather's point is a good one. I shall not make a judgment until there has been more discussion of the matter, maybe when we get to the other clauses where the references to couples and marriage so on appear.

I move now to another issue to which oblique references have been made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance and by the Minister of National Health and Welfare. The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance answered the hon. member for Villeneuve with respect to his remarks about discounters—and the same remarks were made by my friend, the hon. member for Broadview, the other day—by saying that the intention was to get these payments out fast, and in his view that meant that there really was not enough time to worry about discounters getting into the picture. I am not sure that that is a very good answer. If a mother knows she is going to get a \$600 or \$800 cheque in April and she is in need in February or March, the temptation to go to a discounter can be quite real. I think that should be looked at more deeply than was reflected in the remarks of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance.

● (2052)

This leads me to a concern about something to which the Minister of National Health and Welfare referred just a few moments ago. The minister made the point in her speech at

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

second reading that a simple form would be sent out with the January family allowance cheque and that that form would be the kind which people who have never filed income tax returns could complete. The whole idea was that by getting that form out in January and getting it back very quickly, the work could be done and the refundable tax credit cheques sent out.

What concerns me is some language which I see in clause 5 of the bill where it says, in a proposed section 152(1) of the Income Tax Act, the following:

The minister shall, with all due dispatch, examine a taxpayer's return of income for a taxation year, assess the tax for the year, the interest and penalties, if any, payable and determine—

Then it goes on to say that the Minister of Finance, having done that, may send out the refundable tax credit cheques. What I should like to know is very simple. Does this one-page, simple form which the Minister of National Health and Welfare says her department is going to send out in January qualify as the taxpayer's return of income for a taxation year, as referred to in clause 5? In other words, can we be sure that the clearly stated and completely approved position taken by the Minister of Finance and the Minister of National Health and Welfare is going to be implemented? Can we be sure that that will be done? Will that simple, one-page form about which the Minister of National Health and Welfare talks qualify as a taxpayer's return for the purpose of getting this refundable tax credit into her hands?

I think the minister said that 1.5 million mothers are non-filers. These will be women who are not in the habit of filing income tax returns and who are buffaloed by almost any legal document or questionnaire they have to fill out. I appreciate that what the minister wants to do is to get for those people a simple form so that the money will come back in two or three months. Is that going to happen, or are these people going to be told, "Well, you have not yet filed a taxpayer's return of income for a taxation year"?

Some of the things I have said have been part of the speechmaking we do around here. I want to emphasize again the importance of universality, indexation and so forth, but I would like to have the minister's comments as to her determination to get commitments from the provinces, as to what she is going to do about the consumer price index, and anything further she wants to say about Mr. Fairweather's comments. In particular I should like to know if we can be sure that there will be speedy delivery of these cheques to the 1.5 million mothers to whom I referred as well as to all the rest.

[*Translation*]

**Miss Bégin:** May I take a few minutes to answer, Mr. Chairman?

**The Chairman:** Agreed.

**Miss Bégin:** The first three points were probably comments made by the hon. member. I have listened closely to his explanation about the universality of indexation. I have already stated my commitment to those two fundamental