

Family Allowances

It is important to note that birth rates in Canada have fallen to their lowest level. The average family now has 2.19 children. But even at that, equilibrium between births and deaths in this country will not be achieved for another 67 years at the present rate. Incidentally, the most socially responsible province in this country, in terms of family size, is Quebec, which has the lowest birth rate of 1.9 children per family. The whole province should be congratulated on its responsibility.

There has been a myth in the part of the country I come from that family allowances were somehow a device or method invented by Mackenzie King to retain the Quebec vote. Based on the figures I have given, it would seem that this would apply to the vote in P.E.I. which has the highest birth rate in Canada. In any event, the family allowance was an important piece of legislation to Quebec, just as it has been to all parts of the country. I can find no evidence that it has either increased the desire to have a large family or the desire to have a small family. But we do need a national population policy in this country, one which sets population goals consistent with our responsibilities as world citizens. Thereafter we should take legislative action to achieve those goals.

● (2130)

What we are really doing here is legislating this increase to relieve the effects of a disastrous inflationary cycle. There is no doubt, at least in my mind, that inflation is caused by rising population in a world of finite resources. If by granting this increase we were encouraging larger families in this country, we would be acting irresponsibly and wrongly. However, as I say, I can find no evidence to that effect so I have no hesitation in supporting this piece of legislation.

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak on this bill largely because of the speech made by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) when he introduced the legislation. I think it is one thing for the government to introduce this measure which, judging from the speeches to date, most members of the House intend to support, but it is something entirely different for the government, having introduced the bill, not to admit that their mishandling of the economy has resulted in the country needing the bill.

I say that, Mr. Speaker, because I find it very curious, on a bill which contemplates the raising of the family allowance from the present levels to new levels, that the minister to whom I have referred went out of his way to try to indicate that the inflationary pressures in the country are not due to his government but are somehow due to the world inflation in which his government is caught up. It is time that members of this House stood up and be counted.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: They did last night.

Mr. Stevens: It is the government's mishandling of the economy that has resulted in inflationary, skyrocketing prices. It is time that members of the House on all sides stood up and refuted the ministers of the Crown who are consistently misrepresenting the facts in the House. Let us

[Mr. Leggatt.]

look at the facts. What did the minister say when he introduced this bill?

An hon. Member: Talk about the Bank of Western Canada.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, you always know when you are hitting home. The yahoos start to yelp and holler. Let us look at some of the statements the minister made when he introduced this bill. For example, he said he was introducing it so he could "protect the purchasing power of Canadian consumers." He said that Canadians are now suffering "the first consequences" of inflation, especially in the area of food costs. Mr. Speaker, if we are only suffering the first consequences, I hate to think what the last consequences of such food increases will be.

The minister pointed out that there are 3½ million families, who are responsible for 7½ million children and adolescents, affected by this bill. But I would point out that he attempted to get off the hook as to why we have inflationary pressures in Canada by suggesting it is due to the exceptional increases in food prices which confirm the urgency of passing such provisions. In another section of his speech he said these food prices are due to inflation which Canada, like most other countries of the world, has been recently experiencing.

As I say, Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. Surely the minister would not deny his own publication which is put out by the Bank of Canada. In June, 1973, that publication reported that the consumer price index for food for certain industrialized countries indicated clearly that in the 12 months ended last April we in Canada had the worst record of inflation of any of the countries listed in that review. I point to the fact that Canada is listed as having an inflationary rate ending in that period of 12.9 per cent, compared with the United States rate of 11.5 per cent and a low rate, for example, in Germany of 8.1 per cent. That is not the type of thing the government is inclined to admit in this House. Instead, members of the government like to mislead the public into believing that somehow we in Canada are doing even better on the question of inflation than other countries of the world.

As my leader indicated earlier, the IMF has also pointed out that Canada has one of the worst records of any of the industrialized nations with respect to inflation.

Mr. Railton: That is not true. That is what you said.

Mr. Stevens: In short, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that it is not so much a world problem that is causing inflation to the degree that exists in Canada but, rather, a Trudeau Liberal government problem that is causing our high inflationary pressures. If you like, Mr. Speaker, one could say that in fact Liberal years of government are inflationary years of government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: And Tory times are hard times.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!