

*Family Income Security Plan*

• (1540)

The same thing applies to fishermen and small businessmen whose incomes depend on the profits of their businesses, particularly those located in rural Canada or in areas where fishing is the main industry. Their incomes fluctuate greatly. Those people may belong to what the minister calls the middle income group, people who make between \$7,000 and \$10,000 a year for a year or two. When their incomes drop below that sum, those people are patronized and told to rush down to make an application for family allowances because that year they are poor. Multiply the number in this group by the hundreds of thousands of people in this country whose income fluctuates every year, then imagine the paperwork that will be required and you can visualize the administrative jungle we will have.

What is even more serious is the fact that this legislation will cause people to feel even more alienated from each other than they do now. They will feel alienated from their government and from each other. They will be computerized and categorized according to the incomes of the father and mother and even the incomes of teenage children, because if those children have incomes over a given amount they must be declared on income tax forms. I assume, therefore, they must also be declared when applying for family allowance benefits under this bill. All of this information goes into the computer and everyone becomes a little card. If your income changes by \$500, you must rush down and report it and then the next year make out a new application. Your card goes into the computer, the bell rings, the red light flashes and it spits out another card indicating how much less or how much more you will get or whether you will get anything at all.

Family allowances are for people, for children. Old age pensions also are for people, not because they are old but because they have a right to them which they have earned through their contributions to their country all their lives. Family allowances are for children, for their education. This group of people whom the minister calls middle income people I submit are not middle income people because they are barely making it. Tens of thousands of mothers have had a small savings account for each child into which the family allowance cheque went, and when that child was ready to go to university there was \$1,000, \$1,500 or \$2,000 that had accrued to help finance his or her education. If the boy or girl did not wish to go to university, the money stayed in the account until he or she got married and it helped to start them off. In some cases, it was used to purchase clothes. I know a number of mothers who have saved family allowances in separate bank accounts. They did not let the old man touch it for beer or cigarettes, but would use it to buy clothing for their children or to finance their vacations.

However, if those families are now in what the minister classifies as the middle income group, they will get less money in family allowance benefits. If they earn more than \$10,000 a year, they will get nothing at all. It is inconceivable to expect this kind of legislation to work or to be accepted. We do not accept it and we never will. The government has flown in the face of a policy that was traditionally theirs, at least since 1944. It has flown in the face of what members of all parties in the House have

favoured for many years, the principle of universality. No self respecting businessman would try to operate his business in the way in which the minister propose to administer this legislation. It flies in the face of good administrative sense and judgment. It asks too much of people. It imposes upon them. As I said earlier, it perpetuates the paternalistic and patronizing attitude of the government towards the poor.

Family allowances are a matter of right, not a privilege. From those whose incomes are in fact high, those who could be called the middle income group, for example people making \$15,000 a year, we propose that we would recover a major part of the extra cost through the income tax. The minister mentioned the figure of \$700 million a year. We could recover a large part of that sum through the tax system, and do so fairly on the basis of the ability to pay. We should not demand that people come to the government each year to expose all their private affairs, to expose themselves to government scrutiny and to the computer to see whether they qualify for a few dollars a month or even a few cents a month. If the change in income is only \$500 as compared with the previous year they will receive 33 cents less per each \$100, but the cost of administering this will be more than the 33 cents which will be deducted. I am sure that the bill for electricity for that computer will go up by at least 33 cents each time the button is pushed to make a calculation.

The way in which the minister proposes to administer the family allowances plan in the future is stupid. One thing for which I have always given credit to the Liberals is that they were reasonably efficient, honest and reasonably good administrators. But this will be a boar's nest—

**Mr. McBride:** This will be what?

**Mr. Benjamin:** It will be a boar's nest.

**Mr. McBride:** Describe a boar's nest.

**Mr. Benjamin:** I would be delighted to do so sometime. It is a good prairie expression. To ask me or any other member in the House to approve that kind of administrative procedure is ridiculous.

May I conclude by repeating that the minister's remarks yesterday, not only about the stand of the NDP on this bill but more particularly about the stand of my leader and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre were unworthy of the minister. I hope he does not try to perpetuate that kind of nonsense. I hope he will be man enough to admit that he should not have said that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is opposed to giving money to the poor. I hope he does not try to perpetuate that kind of nonsense because if he does, he will be earning a punch on the nose from many thousands of people across this country who have admired and respected the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre for his stand with regard to the poor, whether or not they support him politically. I hope that members of all parties will think seriously about our amendment before it comes to a vote and that they will decide it is worthy of support, that in fact it makes this bill into what it should be, a universal Family Income Security Plan that is more meaningful, that does not discriminate, that does not computerize and does not alienate. I hope they will recognize that with this