

Family Allowances Act

Canada a total of 4,085,000 wage earners. Of that number some 2,088,000 or 53 per cent received less than \$2,000 a year. In my opinion an annual earning of less than \$2,000 a year by a married man with two or three children is insufficient to properly clothe, to properly feed and to properly educate his children.

The same publication shows that, in 1951, of that total number of 4,085,000 wage earners, approximately 1,500,000 or 37 per cent earned less than \$1,500 per year.

Going on, this official publication shows that of the four million wage earners approximately 900,000 or 22 per cent earn less than \$1,000 a year. Let us take the million and a half wage earners in Canada who in 1951 earned less than \$1,500 a year. Does the Minister of National Health and Welfare contend that the present family allowance cheque is sufficient to help adequately heads of families who earn less than \$1,500 a year to clothe and feed their growing children. It is nearly impossible for those parents in that 37 per cent of working Canadians to feed and clothe their children adequately. I know that even the increase I suggest would not guarantee proper food and clothing for all children for whom family allowances are paid, but it would be a substantial contribution to that end.

Over the years that family allowances have been paid I feel that the mothers of Canada have spent the money as it was meant to be spent, for the betterment of their children. I think that is borne out by the fact that, according to the last annual report, since May, 1947, only 136 prosecutions were successfully completed. When one bears in mind that there are some two million families receiving the family allowance, I think it is clear that almost without exception the family allowance cheque is used for the purposes for which it was intended. Therefore if it is used for the purposes for which it was intended and if, as is correct, a million and a half wage earners in Canada earned less than \$1,500 in 1951, surely it is time for the government to give sympathetic consideration to increasing the family allowance, and I suggest to the minister and the government that legislation should be introduced at this session of parliament to increase the family allowance by not less than 60 per cent.

The question needs to be answered as to whether Canada can afford such an increase. I believe we can. I admit it is a considerable amount of money but I believe it can be paid, as I have said, out of our increased wealth production. I estimate that a 60 per cent increase in the family allowance would

cost \$192 million. Our gross national product for the year ended March 31, 1952—

Mr. Martin: Will the hon. member permit a question? The figure of \$192 million was for what?

Mr. Argue: I am sorry, I did not hear the minister.

Mr. Martin: I should like to ask my friend whether, when he quoted a figure of \$192 million, it had relation to what the increased expenditure resulting from this proposal would be.

Mr. Argue: Yes. That is my estimate based on the cost for the year ended March 31, 1952, which was listed in the annual report as \$320 million. The minister may have some figures that are more up to date, but I do not think the estimate would be far out in any event.

Mr. Gibson: Barnyard economics.

Mr. Argue: What kind do you follow, rule of thumb?

Mr. Gibson: Just the opposite to yours.

Mr. Argue: I wonder what the hon. member would say about the motion. I hope he is not suggesting that he opposes it.

Mr. Gibson: I think so.

Mr. Argue: I estimate that an increase of 60 per cent in the family allowance would cost the national treasury an additional \$192 million in any one year. Our gross national production for the year ended March 31, 1952, was some \$21.2 billion. The 60 per cent increase in the family allowance that I am advocating represents less than 1 per cent of the gross national production. Let us take a look at what has been happening to the share of the gross national production that is being used for family allowances. In the fiscal year 1946-47 \$245 million was spent on family allowances. Our national wealth production in that year was some \$12 billion. In other words, 2 per cent was paid out of our production in 1946-47 for the purpose of family allowances.

For the year ended March 31, 1952, the amount paid for family allowances had increased to \$320 million but our national production had increased to \$21.2 billion, and family allowances in 1951-52 represented only 1½ per cent of our national production compared with 2 per cent in 1946-47. The suggestion I make is that the percentage of our national production that is used to provide family allowance payments should not be allowed to decrease, and most certainly not to the extent of 25 per cent over a five-year period. Instead of the government marching

[Mr. Argue.]