

Supply—Health and Welfare

This means, Mr. Chairman, that if the government is ready to launch a war against poverty in Canada, the opposition is ready to support it.

We note that large families are apt to be poverty-stricken. This is a fact and it is our duty to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare to take immediately the necessary steps to increase family allowances in order that they may be more consistent with the present cost of living.

I state this suggestion in addition to that I made a few moments ago concerning allowances paid to students.

Now, there is another matter about which I would like to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I do not know if, to date, he has had any opportunity to meet his Quebec counterpart, Hon. René Lévesque. But we have been hearing for many months that the hon. provincial minister intends to take over administration of family allowances. He suggests that these allowances would be granted by the government of Quebec and the latter would receive fiscal compensation from the federal government.

Would the hon. minister disclose the present stage of the discussions with Hon. René Lévesque to this effect. I wish to point out that the statement of Hon. René Lévesque to the effect that the first and even the second child of a family will not be covered by family allowances has led to many protests.

In some letters I have received from families with three, four or five children, it is said that it is no use doubling family allowances if nothing is paid for the first and second child. Anyway, they say, it would be the same.

I should like some enlightenment from the minister on the intentions of the federal government as far as allowances paid to students up to age 21 are concerned and on the intentions of the federal government concerning the readjustment of family allowances to the cost of living, and also on its intentions concerning the wish of the Minister of Health of the province of Quebec to have control over family allowances and to get fiscal compensation from the Ottawa government.

Now, sir, I conclude not by placing before the minister all the requests received by me in connection with family allowances, but by telling him once more, and this is my own opinion, that if we are to fight poverty in Canada, we must give thought to large families. I have no doubt that if family allowances were geared to the present cost of

[Mr. Vincent.]

living, which is always on the increase, we could render a very great service to our large Canadian families.

Mr. Caouette: Mr. Chairman, would the hon. member allow me a question?

Mr. Vincent: Certainly.

Mr. Caouette: I appreciate his position with regard to an increase in family allowances. Would the hon. member tell the house why his party, which was in power for five years, forgot during that time, to increase family allowances according to the cost of living index?

Mr. Vincent: Mr. Chairman, if I were to take the time, this afternoon, to say—

Mr. Caouette: Take the time.

Mr. Vincent: —all that was possible to do—

Mr. Caouette: Physically.

Mr. Vincent: —during that period of five years, well, it would be too long. But I am sure, as the hon. member for Villeneuve very often says it, I cannot recall his expression: "All that is physically possible"—

Mr. Caouette: Must be financially possible.

Mr. Vincent: All that is physically possible must be financially workable.

Mr. Choquette: And really desirable.

Mr. Vincent: One must consider that this is the year 1966 and that this government has been in power for four years already. The hon. member for Villeneuve is exerting pressure so as to raise family allowances; let him keep on joining us in order to ask this government to act in the direction we all want, namely raise family allowances.

● (5:50 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. Herridge: Mr. Chairman, I want to be very brief.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Herridge: I see that is welcomed on the government side of the house. I want to congratulate the minister on his appointment. He has a formidable task ahead of him in the next few years which will tax all his skill, his tact and his patience. I also want to compliment the parliamentary secretary on her appointment. I know she is keen about her responsibilities and takes them seriously. I want to say in passing that she adds a charming dash of colour to a very drab male landscape.