

Family Allowances Act

is any reform in connection with family allowances that is being put forward with greater vigour than any other, it is the suggestion made by the hon. member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Thomas), who said that he would prefer to see the age qualification increased from 16 years to at least 18 years. I would certainly agree with him that there seems to be greater justification and greater demand for that kind of reform than there is for the reform put forward in the motion now before us.

Then there is the further argument made by the hon. member for Skeena (Mr. Applewhaite), that there is great danger to any social benefit when you apply the principle of movable benefits. That is a most dangerous thing to do. I do not think that as long as I am holding this post I would recommend to my colleagues in the government or to the people of Canada that that principle be adopted. The dangers are precisely as related by the hon. member for Skeena.

I have given the estimated expenditures in family allowances for the fiscal year 1951-52. The figures for the calendar year 1952 are very interesting indeed. They show a total of \$330,827,545, with an average monthly payment from January 1952 to October 1952 of roughly \$27 million. November and December of 1952 show an increase in family allowance payments, with the result that the average for those two months was a little over \$28 million. In January 1952 we paid out in family allowances \$27,400,000 to 1,956,183 families representing 4,496,739 children. In December, when the average monthly payment rose from \$27 million to \$28 million, payments were made to 2,021,745 families representing 4,668,987 children.

Is it any wonder that writers like Dorothy Thompson and others have admired this program because of the far-reaching distributive effect on the children of the nation, and indeed on the nation itself? When one looks at the various amounts paid to all the provinces one will appreciate what that means to the children at the present time as well as what it meant to them in 1945 when the act was introduced. If I have any criticism to make of the speech of the proposer of this resolution it is that he belittled the accomplishments to date of this great measure.

Mr. Argue: Not at all.

Mr. Martin: My hon. friend says "not at all" and I am happy to have the correction. When one looks at the amount of money paid in family allowances to Canadian children from Newfoundland in the east to British Columbia in the west, including the Northwest Territories and the Yukon, one cannot

help but conclude that those who were responsible for the inception of this measure will deserve for a long time the thanks of the great majority of the people of this country.

This act was intended to benefit the great majority of the people. It was predicated upon the fact that 19 per cent of the working population of Canada is responsible for almost 84 per cent of the children of Canada up to 16 years of age. It was predicated upon the fact that our wage system does not take into account the obligations of a parent with one or more children as compared with those of an employee who is not married. It was done in a way that no other country in the world has succeeded in doing, without in any way encouraging a disposition to depress the wage scale of the wage earners of the country. At first labour was a little concerned about this measure, and not unnaturally so. They had seen the experience of France and at least 20 other countries of the world where family allowance schemes were in existence and where their maintenance had been used, not to add to the daily receipt of income by the wage earner but as a means of depressing wages, as a means of substituting payments by the state for the fact that the employer had failed to carry out his obligation in terms of economic return to his employees.

Those of us who sit on this side, and I as the minister responsible for the administration of this act, make no apology for the attitude I am taking with regard to this proposal. In fact in taking the attitude that I do, I feel I am strengthening—I say this with great respect to the hon. member—the structure upon which the family allowance measure in this country is based. I want to see it preserved. I do not want steps taken now which might result later in a serious reduction in this or in any other social welfare measure. That has happened in Great Britain; it is happening today in France. That has happened in Belgium and in at least four other European countries. It has happened in at least three Latin-American countries that I know of.

The estimate for the fiscal year 1953-54 for family allowance payments is \$347 million. We estimate that the increase on the basis of the present program is from \$12 million to \$15 million annually. I know those are facts and considerations which my hon. friend would feel it was necessary for me to indicate in answering his proposition. I have before me a table which I would ask the house to allow me to place on *Hansard*, unless it is insisted that I go through it in