

Housewives' Allowance

Regarding the target population and the principal objective of the proposed policy study, namely, material support for parents with dependent children, I will address a fourth issue. This is the issue, as stated in the motion before us, of ensuring the adequacy of global income of families in relation to needs.

As you are all well aware, early in 1973 the government initiated a review aimed toward this objective: ensuring the adequacy of family income to meeting needs. At that time the Minister of National Health and Welfare tabled in this House the working paper on social security in Canada and launched the joint federal-provincial social security review. Since that review began there have been several major initiatives which have contributed very substantially to the attainment of the type of income security system envisaged by the hon. member for Bellechasse.

It will not be necessary to remind the House in detail of the many provisions that have come into being during the last few years through the sponsorship in the Ministry of National Health and Welfare and through the actions of this House. Among them I will cite only the tripling of family allowances, the tying of their purchasing power to the cost of living; the increases in old age security and in the guaranteed income supplement payments as well as their tying in to the consumer price index; the increase in Canada Pension Plan benefits and their protection against inflation as well as the increases which we have seen across the country in social assistance scheduled. Last but not least is the steep rise in income tax exemptions that has taken place.

Beyond these provisions, as I have already suggested, further income distribution proposals should be addressed to specific target populations in need. It is not sufficient to demonstrate that a segment of those affected are still in need in order to argue for augmenting universal income provisions. The taxpayer will not easily agree to give up more money for such unspecific purposes.

Therefore, the purpose of the motion must be understood to refer to the investigation and consideration of the needs of parents with dependent children which are not presently met by the broader income support systems. Clearly, only a portion of those with children will be found with valid claims for greater financial assistance; and that portion is by definition to be found largely among low income families. The motion, therefore, suggests that an investigation is necessary to determine in which income groups we still find parents with dependent children whose financial needs are not fully met for whatever reasons.

● (1732)

This is the type of issue which my department investigates on a continuing basis, and in so far as the issue raised by the motion is understood in these terms, I find myself in full agreement with it. Creating an atmosphere of financial security for every Canadian does not mean that we can be complacent and pretend that all problems are being solved. There are

[Mr. Robinson.]

emerging needs and heightened perceptions of needs in a rapidly changing society which force us to be watchful and responsive at all times. In fact, as I have already stated in this House, the Department of National Health and Welfare is currently studying the means for instituting tax credits to benefit low-income earners and one-parent families, which are examples of how we seek to respond to changing needs in society. These studies, I might add, are also targeted in large measure to provide support to parents with dependent children.

Having said all that, I can now address a fifth issue, namely that this proposal does indeed refer to the provision of family allowances and income tax exemptions for dependent spouses and children. These are the two basic mechanisms available for the support of the child-rearing responsibilities of parents. With regard to family allowances, the first substantial step towards ensuring that family income matches family responsibilities was taken in 1974 by increasing the allowances to an average of \$20 per month, by tying their purchasing power to the cost of living, and by maximizing the benefits to lower and middle income groups through the taxation of the allowance. In addition, provision was made for provincial legislatures to vary the level of federal family allowances, subject to national norms, in order to better integrate them with provincial social security systems. Two provinces, Quebec and Alberta, have taken advantage of these provisions.

With regard to personal income tax exemptions, I need only say that the basic deductions for the tax-filer, spouse, and two children under 16 today is \$5,120 as opposed to \$2,600 for the same family six years ago.

I would contend, Mr. Speaker, that the motion put forth by the hon. member for Bellechasse, although commendable in its intent, when examined closely comes down to a request for consideration of measures for the support of parents with dependent children in low-income situations, and that it is therefore misdirected in failing to take into account the existence of two very important provisions designed to accomplish precisely the objective which he advances. On the basis of these thoughts, Mr. Speaker, I cannot support this motion.

Mr. David MacDonald (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, I am extremely grateful to the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) for bringing forward this motion; it is an important contribution to the list of subjects considered by this House during the private members' hour. As the previous speaker recognized, this is a matter which has been causing increasing concern not only to people in government but to many in the private sector as well. I do not think we should lose sight of the fact that one important if not crucial aspect of this subject involves recognition of the value of labour, of work done by those who work in the home.

We should not assume, simply because of the appearance of this motion before us, that there has been widespread acceptance of the idea that a definite value should be attached to the contribution made by homeworkers. While traditionally the major part of home-making activities has been carried out by women, increasing numbers of men are choosing to spend a