

The Address—Mr. Portelance

am surprised to note that the leader of the official opposition (Mr. Stanfield) criticizes the content of this Speech only to turn around and take credit for the measures which are proposed. He is accusing the government of stealing the Progressive Conservative platform as if his party were the only one concerned with the well-being of Canadians. I think that it would be more honest to state that the Speech from the Throne contains rather the recommendations and suggestions of all parties, including those of the Social Credit party of Canada, the New Democratic party the Conservative party and the Liberal party.

During the recent election campaign, I have met a number of my fellow citizens, mostly mothers, who told me that the present family allowances did not meet needs any longer and would only be justifiable if they were adjusted to the needs of the people.

I was happy to listen to our Prime minister's New Year's message, in which he insisted upon the family, which is one of the foundations of society and I quote:

The Christmas season gives us opportunity to be present with our families and our loved ones from whom at other times of the year we are too often separated by work and circumstances. We are able to consider how fortunate we are to live in a country which protects the family unit as a very precious element, which regards it as one of the cornerstones in our way of life. It is in a family setting that so many of our national characteristics are best understood, and best appreciated.

In 1973, the family is as important as it was in 1944. The right hon. Mackenzie King, who was the Prime Minister, said in this House and I quote:

Family and home are the foundations of national life. In order to secure a minimum of welfare for the nation's children as well as to provide them as many equal opportunities as possible in the fight of life, you will have to approve a measure designed to establish family allowances.

Mr. Speaker, it was true in 1944 and it is even more so in 1973 that family is one of the foundations of the Canadian society. I hope that, very soon, the hon. Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) will give us all details as regards a piece of legislation in this very important field of family allowances.

Advantages brought by such a plan are obvious. In the first place, we must help the family and better abide by the principle of social justice. Of course, allowances are financed by the rich, those whose incomes are high enough to make them fall in the taxable brackets. Indeed, it is mostly to meet the expenses represented by all kinds of allowances that the federal government is compelled to maintain a high level of income tax. It is more fair this way: those who are more privileged and have more resources obviously benefit more than others from society and the general prosperity. Is it not fair that they contribute more to assist those who, by bringing up children, make possible the existence and prosperity of the nation?

Low income people, of course, are not assessed at the same tax rates. However, they pay indirect taxes, which the government collects on consumer goods. This is an ideal tax from the point of view of people within the government, because it is easy to collect and because taxpayers pay it and often do not notice it.

But although this indirect tax is advantageous to the government, it brings serious drawbacks to the taxpayer.

[Mr. Portelance.]

For one thing, by its very nature, it prevents any deduction for dependents; secondly, and this is more serious, it makes heads of families poorer to the very extent that their dependent expenses are higher and decrease their ability to pay. For instance, the 12 percent tax on manufactured goods which is included in the selling price to the consumer is to be paid only once by the purchaser who is single. However, a man with dependents pays it once for himself, again because of his wife and as many times as he has children. This is the case for all indirect taxes going to the government.

This is a case of injustice for those with families. If the government is to maintain much longer this indirect taxation, it must make up for this injustice and has no way of reimbursing the taxpayers other than paying family allowances or a guaranteed annual income which will correct this situation.

It is often said: "Equal pay for equal work". It is true to a certain extent. However, responsibilities of single persons and of those with dependents are not the same and the matter of equal pay does not hold true.

Mr. Speaker: It being six o'clock, I do now leave the Chair.

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. Portelance: Mr. Speaker, since I began to speak shortly before recess, I will try to be as brief as possible.

I said before recess that we often hear the following saying: Equal pay for equal work. It is true up to some extent, but the responsibilities of the two individuals, a single person and a married person with children, are not the same and equal pay is unfair.

During the last election campaign, several mothers complained that family allowances had not been increased for many years. As early as 1951, they rightly complained that the amount of \$5 per child up to 6 years of age, was inadequate. This fabulous amount of \$5 was not enough to buy a quart of milk daily at 19 cents a quart for a month. Do we realize that in 1973, although the allowance for that age group has been raised to \$6 per month up to 10 years of age, it is not even enough to buy a quart of milk a day for 30 days, because the milk is sold at 35 cents a quart? Milk costs have increased twofold, but family allowances are still at almost the same level.

Mr. Speaker, I urge the government and the Minister concerned to review this situation as early as possible and to increase once and for all family allowances in such a way as to allow the head of the family to discharge his responsibilities more readily. If family allowances were pegged on the cost of living, as the old age pensions are, they would truly be effective.

It is true that during the last Parliament a bill was introduced. Although it was not perfect, I am sure many Canadian families would have benefited from the amendment, even those of the riding of Toronto-Trinity whose