

Family Income Security Plan

bring the purchasing power of the family allowance benefits to what they were in 1945. Let us look at these people whom the minister proposes will either receive less benefits or be excluded. Let us take the wage earner. It is usual nowadays rather than unusual, as was the case 20 or 30 years ago, for the income of people to fluctuate, even though they may only change jobs 4, 5 or 10 times in their lifetime. A wage earner will be laid off, fired, promoted or demoted. It is not uncommon for this to happen to him many times in his lifetime. The level of income fluctuates up and down, particularly at a time when people are being victimized by a Liberal government, and when unemployment is high.

Because of unemployment a person's income may go down and then go up again when he returns to work. The Minister of National Health and Welfare says that if this should happen the person could very well make a new application for benefits under this program. It is not unusual for someone with an income of \$10,000 or \$12,000 a year to have his income substantially reduced because he must take another position, but by the time he gets through all the red tape involved in reapplying and receiving these benefits weeks and months will have elapsed. An unnecessary burden is placed on the public when one must apply every time his income level changes by \$500 a year or more. I think this is really an imposition. It is an imposition on the taxpayers in terms of the cost of administering this type of program as proposed by the minister. The single parent in this bracket for whom the minister proposes to provide less benefits have more costs to bear. Oh yes, the minister may say they will be able to deduct the cost of babysitters, the cost of housekeepers, the extra cost involved in educating their children and so on, but it is still an imposition.

There are higher costs, not only in monetary ways but in other ways as well. Even though a single parent, one who is widowed, separated or divorced, may have an income of \$7,000, \$8,000 or \$9,000 a year that parent will have more difficulty in supporting children, but since the minister considers that level of income as the middle level that parent will receive less or be excluded entirely. The more one thinks about it, the more one is ashamed to see this kind of legislation presented in this House. It is uncivilized, it is mean and it is vicious. It divides people.

I am sorry the minister has not returned to his seat. He made some statements about the New Democratic Party, about its leader and about the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). He can say what he likes about me, but when he infers that the New Democratic Party is opposed to giving these allowances to the poor he indicated that he expects millions of people in this country to believe something they know is not true. When he suggests that my leader, the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), is opposed to this bill and is therefore opposed to giving these allowances to the poor, he is expecting millions of people in this country to believe the unbelievable. It is incredible that the minister would expect anybody would believe this of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre. I suppose there is hardly a citizen in Canada who does not know about and recognize the reputation this hon. gentleman has in the field of social security for something over 30 years. In fact, I submit the day will never arrive when the Minister of National

[Mr. Benjamin.]

Health and Welfare will be able to carry water for the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre.

Mr. Peters: And he doesn't drink very much water.

Mr. Benjamin: That kind of a suggestion by the Minister of National Health and Welfare is not only ridiculous, it is insulting. If he had wanted to say it about me I could not care less, but he will not get away with saying it about the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre or the hon. member for York South. We know there could be political difficulties for the New Democratic Party in the stand we are taking on this, but we make no bones about it and are not running or hiding. I think we have established a good reputation in this country for putting up this kind of a fight for people. For the Liberals to suggest that we are in favour of the rich receiving these allowances, is again asking millions of people in this country to believe the unbelievable.

I do not think you, Mr. Speaker, or anyone in Canada has any doubt about the stand of our party, of our leader or of our leaders before him on this matter, over a period of many, many years. Those who are on high income still do not and never have paid their fair share of the cost of running this country and the cost of having as decent a society as we can. We have taken the lead in demanding and fighting for higher levels of taxation for those who are wealthy. We have taken the lead in this country in fighting the gifts to corporations, their exemptions and allowances under the tax laws of Canada which permit them to evade hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes.

When the minister says that acceptance of our proposals to make these benefits at the \$15 and \$20 level universal would cost \$700 million a year more, I say so what. In the first place, if he had completed reading our amendment he would have known that we proposed there be appropriate amendments to the tax laws which would result in those above the level of \$15,000, \$20,000 or \$50,000 or \$100,000 a year paying back a major portion of what they received as family allowance. Surely, this is the way in which it should be done. Surely this would involve the least imposition on the public rather than putting people in categories on the basis of how much money they might happen to earn in a given year, then expecting them to return like mendicants year after year and reapply at their new income levels.

Another group which the minister obviously considers to be at the middle income level are the farmers. Their incomes go up and down like a galloping jackrabbit, varying from a low of \$1,500 to a high of \$15,000 in a period of two years. In a period of low income, they can receive the family allowance, but if they experienced a few years of high income they would lose the benefits of the family allowance while at the same time they would be paying off debts accrued in the years of low income. The minister can allow them all the deductions similar to those he allows when they make out their income tax forms. If this is the kind of paper work the minister demands of a section of our society, I hope they will tell him to go to blazes.