

Mothers Allowances

• (5:30 p.m.)

Mr. Patterson: That is a pitiful exemption.

Mr. Byrne: Under the family and youth allowance programs, income support is provided for families with children up to the age of 17. In 1966-67 the total federal expenditures under these programs amounted to \$621 million, the annual average family allowance payment per child amounted to \$81.12, and the annual average payment per recipient under the youth allowances program amounted to \$115.

The hon. member pointed out that we were prepared to spend \$100 million for defence as of last year, and that this was only one fifth of what we are paying annually in family allowances. We heard the same sort of propaganda back in 1938 and 1939 from the leader of her party, who later was not even prepared to pay the cost of providing for the training of militia cadets in preparation for the defence of Canada. His views changed considerably as the war continued and as the Nazis began to ravage Europe.

The hon. member's proposal fails to specify whether such an allowance on behalf of mothers would be paid on a universal or an income test basis. Certainly the resolution does not specify it. If it were paid on a universal basis, the allowance would discriminate between those families with lower incomes and those with higher incomes, because each mother would receive the same amount. If it were paid on an income test basis, it would involve considerable administrative problems, and certainly that is an understatement. This is particularly true in view of the variability of incomes of many families which would be covered by such a program.

The proposal ignores the special income needs of families headed by women, such as widows, divorcees and women who are separated from their husbands. The hon. member has said that mothers should be encouraged to stay at home. She ignores the fact that welfare payments and widows allowances provide much more than was ever contemplated in France, or for that matter in any other country. Perhaps it is not sufficient to cover the needs, but the amount is remarkably above anything provided in any other countries the hon. member may have mentioned. In most instances, not only is the need for extra income greater than in the case of normal families, but the presence in the home of the mother is even more important for the development of family life.

By its very nature, such a program of allowances for mothers would be open to abuse. Even with the elaborate and expensive administrative system which would be required, it would be extremely difficult to ensure that recipients did not in fact take up gainful employment outside the home.

Even with the very substantial increase in real family income in recent years, the participation of married women in the labour force has risen steadily. For example, between 1951 and 1961 the average weekly wages and salaries, in current dollars, for the industrial composite went up from \$50.04 to \$78.11, an increase of 56.1 per cent. When these amounts are adjusted by the 1949 consumer price index, the increase amounts to 37.4 per cent. At the same time between 1951 and 1961 the participation rate of married women in the labour force rose from 9.56 per cent to 18.47 per cent, or almost doubled. Thus it would appear questionable whether increasing family income through the payment of allowances to mothers, as proposed by the hon. member, would in fact have the desired effect.

Of necessity, such a program of allowances for mothers would be very expensive. If for example an allowance of \$120 a year, which is only \$10 a month, were paid to all husband and wife families, with children eligible to receive family allowances in 1961, the cost would be in the neighbourhood of \$280 million a year. If we were to make it anything more than a token allowance, such as, say, \$30 a month, this amount would approach \$1 billion, or somewhat more than we are paying out in old age security. If we combined old age security with old age assistance, plus the supplemental allowance, the cost would be approximately \$1 billion. While data from the 1966 census are not yet available, there is no doubt that the number of such families is much higher than it was in 1961. Thus the cost of such a program would be considerably greater than the figure cited earlier. In view of this, the adoption of the hon. member's proposal in the context of the current federal budgetary situation would hardly appear feasible.

The hon. member made reference to the Vanier institute of family life. I am sure the Vanier institute did not make any provision for legalized abortion. However, the document prepared by the institute is significant and important, and its recommendations should be studied carefully.