

Merchant Seaman Compensation Act

the upbringing of a youngster to provide him with a sense of security and belonging, which seem to be the basic traits that contribute to good citizenship, most psychologists appear to agree, are those to be found in a constructive home atmosphere, and the family unit appears to be the best environment in which to foster these elements. Although not intended to have this effect the amendment in application would I think tend to destroy rather than increase family units and this causes me some concern.

Under the existing legislation the compensation is paid to the person who takes the place of the head of the family and maintains the household. The hon. member in saying that they had to move into the same house was, I think, construing the term "household" somewhat narrowly. In my view the words "maintaining the household" do not necessarily mean that they have to live in the same house. Surely what is intended is that "household" means, above all, the family unit. Surely the reference is to the association with the other children. Surely reference is made to the family as a cohesive unit together with personal articles including furniture, and a home if there is one. Essentially, however, in my contention "household" means the family unit. I do not think we must insist that they occupy the same house.

We are dealing here with children who have lost both parents. I am sure all of us know families in which either or both parents is gone. The loss of even one parent is a severe psychological shock to the family. Depending on the age of the children, the loss of the mother is sometimes the most severe shock. Often, too, in families where older boys require firm discipline the loss of the father will have a most disconcerting influence. I am sure all will agree that the loss of both parents, leaving orphan children, is a severe shock indeed and I believe we must tread warily and not fail to recognize the significant consequences of further disruption in the family. We must try to provide every encouragement to maintain these families as units so they will have a sense of belonging when they have experienced a severe blow through the loss of both parents.

I do not think the argument I am presenting is without precedent. While the bill before us seeks to amend the Merchant Seamen Compensation Act there are other compensation and pension acts in all the provinces across Canada dealing with the unfortunate families of those who are bereaved through loss of a parent by an industrial accident or other means. If we examine those measures and the manner in which they are administered I think we will find that emphasis is placed on maintaining the unity of

the family. The effect of the proposed amendment would be to deviate from the legislative enactments in this field across Canada.

That, however, is not the main point. In considering these matters I believe the emphasis should be on maintaining the family unit. In other words, as the minister might put it, we do not live by bread alone. Merely securing the maximum financial assistance for each child is not necessarily the most important factor, although I do not underestimate its importance. We must consider the maximum amount of good we can do for these orphans, no matter what form it takes. I hope hon. members do not interpret my remarks as meaning that in this instance we should take the inexpensive way out and fail to make available as much assistance as possible. I invite hon. members to consider the fact that what is done in the provinces, legislatively, need not necessarily be done on the federal level. There is no essential need for the action of one government to match that of another.

I do suggest, however, that in the provincial compensation and pension acts we have had the benefit of the considered opinion of legislators across the country and the benefit of the experience of those administering these measures. This should offer some guidance as to the most effective means of dealing with this problem.

I suggest, therefore, that when we consider making a departure as radical as I suggest this is, we must consider the custom, procedure and usage that has been tried and proved. I do not wish to be unfair to the hon. member who sponsored this bill but I suggest we must not be reckless in considering a bill of this nature. We must do all we can to encourage the maintenance of the family unit. Surely it is more important to keep the family unit intact than merely to provide additional financial assistance, important though that is.

Mr. Carter: Mr. Chairman, would the hon. member permit a question. Does the hon. member not keep in mind that this bill does not relieve the board of their responsibilities to see that the family unit is maintained, where it can be maintained? That is the responsibility of the board. It appears that the hon. member seems to have lost sight of that fact. This bill does not interfere with that responsibility in any way.

Mr. Nugent: I quite appreciate that fact. I hope my comment was not unfair to the hon. member. I will try to rephrase it. It is simply this. I merely refer to the act as it was, section 2, where it states "and it seems desirable to continue the existing household." When the board is considering the possibility