

if this is an important step, it remains a small step in dealing with the grotesque inequalities that exist in our society. This parliament should be dealing with those inequalities on a priority basis.

● (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, the bill before us gives us an opportunity to think over a few things, and I believe that could be beneficial. Mr. Speaker, what is accomplished through this bill? I think it palliates at the very least some oversights that were allowed to continue to exist since the advent of family allowances.

It will be remembered how for several years our party insisted on the absolute necessity of setting family allowances at a reasonable level which would at least enable us to acknowledge the value of the most important element of a population, the very people who make up that population. And since the advent of family allowances, the small adjustments which were made have always been stingy ones which failed to grapple with the real problem. It was considered more urgent to deal with other types of subsidies and expenditures without realizing that it was absolutely necessary to guarantee at least reasonable allowances to that major element of any population that is the continuance of the family. There was a failure to deal with that to the extent that for a long time family allowances have been simply ridiculous, and still are. It was simply a mockery to continue to give such allowances.

I will be told of course that this bill will solve the problem. I say, Mr. Speaker, that it is not true. Of course if we compare an \$8 allowance with a \$12 allowance, there seems to be a significant increase but it was so unfair to give \$8 or \$10, as the case may be, that what is now being done is far from solving the problem—even if the mathematical increase might be fairly great.

That is why we wonder why in trying to solve such a problem the work is not more in depth than it is. Why not set logical standards? Why not begin at once for instance to deal with the integration of family allowances in a comprehensive system, under which all Canadian families would be guaranteed the necessary minimum income, so that every Canadian could live decently notwithstanding his age? Sooner or later, we shall need an integrated system of that kind instead of skimming over the family allowance issue, as we are doing now, by granting a certain increase to children up to 16 years of age. We contend that it is not enough. A little more should be granted and thus more respect would be shown the Canadian family.

We agree on that, but we should like the government to realize that there is much more to be done and we would want it especially to consider seriously the possibility of solving the problem once and for all through the establishment of a guaranteed annual income system.

We talked about that very during the last election campaign. We say, and we have supporting evidence, that we can realize that immediately, notwithstanding the arguments the minister could put forward against it. And once we will be provided with an integrated guaranteed annual income program, controls will be lessened and we shall no

longer be faced by this illogical situation when control and administration are more costly than the benefits paid.

We are still faced with this situation and this is why we should think about it if we truly want to find adequate solutions to this problem.

Many shortcomings should be corrected. I know that everything cannot be settled at the same time but we should at least indicate some kind of orientation and I would like to point out the inconsistency which consists in an exemption of \$300 per child.

Mr. Speaker, we know about today's cost of living. We know that the new benefits will be far from adequate, that they will not help the families and yet we still accept those figures. How can we encourage the Canadian family? How can we give to each family the ambition and ideal required to reach education, progress and so on since nothing truly encourages the families. This is why when speaking about family allowances we should relate them to the overall situation of Canadian families. This is why I wanted to point out those facts.

If the government thinks that it will please the people and correct major problems with such a bill it is deluding itself, for not much will be cured in this way. At least if the Minister had agreed to immediately raise these allowances to \$20 instead of waiting until the 1st of January 1974, or if he had made the increase retroactive at least to the beginning of 1973, it could have been considered as a more tangible effort the effects of which could have been felt immediately throughout the Canadian economy, since any increase in the purchasing power of the Canadian people could help fight against the calamities which are confronting them: inflation, price increases, and all the other problems which we are facing, Mr. Speaker.

I think that the Minister should think of all these factors which will eventually prompt us to contemplate long term instead of short term solutions. How long will such a law be adequate? How long will we be able to say that we finally found a solution?

That is why we cannot discuss this matter without thinking about the basic problem—a guaranteed minimum income—and that is why also we must think, Mr. Speaker, of the constitutional difficulty as we all know that the government of Quebec in particular jealously wants to control social security. The Quebec Social Affairs Minister tried some time ago, and on that point I agree with him, to set up an integrated social security program. Everyone is aware that it is very difficult to set up such a program when there is a lack of co-ordination, when there is a lack of agreement and when each government follows its own particular way.

At the time it was accepted that the federal government should administer family allowances, we were then of course going against the constitution, but once the population has accepted this principle, of course I am not against the idea that it should continue to accept it. It seems to me however, that a federal government should at least, if it has taken over that field, have the decency to establish logical standards which do not make a mockery of us. When we offer to the provinces such ridiculously small allowances, as I was saying earlier, we do not seem to have the authority of a national government. This is possibly