

Alimony and Maintenance

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Corbin): Order, please. Hon. Members should address their remarks to the Chair.

Mr. Huntington: Hon. Members of the NDP are worrying about tax havens. I guess this might be included as a tax haven, because it certainly is a dodge to move across provincial boundaries, and particularly into the Province of Quebec. As a result, there are all kinds of examples of great hardship being caused, because courts from other Provinces cannot attach the assets of such persons.

If we were to consider Bill C-364 seriously and went back to the Bill presented on May 2, 1980, Bill C-250, we would see that there are some ways in which the federal Government could move in this respect. There are some amendments to existing Acts which should be made. The omnibus Bill should come down or this Bill should go through to committee, and the Minister should be forced to do something about it.

I would urge Hon. Members to start taking this issue very seriously. I would be surprised to find very many of us in this Chamber who have not come across examples of the tragic trauma being experienced by all too many single parent families across this land. Why do we not get on with it and do something about it? Must we sit around and wait for another four or five years before something humane is done to correct this growing problem in a society which is losing the value systems which sustain family units? We seem to be going off in all directions, and most particularly toward more single parent families. All too many parents seem to want to escape the obligations they undertook when they conceived and brought children into this life.

If we are to do any leading and to address anything as serious as this problem, it is time the subject matter got through to a committee and we forced the Minister of Justice (Mr. MacGuigan) to do something serious in the way of addressing amendments to the laws. One cannot handle the detail on the floor of the House, as you know, Mr. Speaker, but in committee we should certainly be able to hear the family law experts and some of the people involved with Bill C-250 so that we can put in this amendment and do much to relieve or even remove this whole problem caused by the breakdown in our courts' ability to sustain the even flow of maintenance payments stipulated in their orders.

Mrs. Margaret Mitchell (Vancouver East): Mr. Speaker, I also extend congratulations on the part of our Party to the Hon. Member for Montreal-Mercier (Mrs. Hervieux-Payette). I am very pleased that there is unanimous consent to refer this Bill to the Justice and Legal Affairs Committee. It seems a very practical step toward helping to solve a very grave problem about which we are all very concerned.

Bill C-364 will authorize the Minister of National Revenue (Mr. Bussi eres) to enforce maintenance orders by compelling employers to deduct maintenance money or alimony owing to a spouse from an employee's paycheque. These moneys, as we know, would be deducted from the employee's paycheque, remitted to the tax department, and then forwarded as maintenance payments to the spouse and the children, the spouse usually being the mother.

Recent statistics from Statistics Canada show the urgency of this situation because of the very dramatic increase in the number of marriages ending in divorce and the number of children, of course, from those marriages, who need to be assured of regular maintenance care. We were recently told that 40 per cent of marriages end in divorce, a 500 per cent increase since the divorce laws were liberated in 1968 in Canada. This involves some 500,000 children of separated parents who need ongoing support. In 1976, however, we were told that there was a 75 per cent default in payments on the part of spouses, again usually the fathers, who were responsible, through agreement, to pay maintenance for their children and families.

On the other side, of course, is the tremendous expense incurred by spouses who need maintenance payments if they must go to lawyers at \$500 a throw in order to follow up and have something done to ensure payment. Therefore, it is a very urgent situation, both as a human problem and also as a financial problem. It involves a great cost to society, as well.

This Bill appears to be a very practical step toward overcoming the very high incidence of non-payment of maintenance to families, payments which are really in default because there is no way in which Provinces or women can now enforce court orders.

Many women who are divorced or separated suffer very severe economic and emotional pressures. I am sure these are reflected in their children in most cases, because support moneys which they need to receive from their husbands or ex-husbands are not forthcoming. We know that in many situations women who are unable to receive support from husbands must resort to applying for welfare, although they are very reluctant to do so. We know of course how inadequate welfare payments are. The very high cost of living, particularly of housing, makes it extremely difficult to survive on welfare payment.

• (1710)

Those women who are working, of course, carry a very heavy and unfair burden and financial responsibility if they are raising children as single parents. We know how inadequate the pay is for most women. They are usually ghettoized in the lowest paid jobs. Many who have been raising children have not been in the work force for long or have been in and out of the work force, and they certainly do not receive equal pay for work of equal value to which they are entitled and which is needed to raise a family and pay for all the costs of child rearing.

So we know that this situation creates extreme hardships for families, in terms of security, and this results, I am sure, in very hostile family relationships. As the wife waits for maintenance payments to pay for rent, food and education, she certainly must feel anything but good about the father of her children, and I am sure this is transmitted to the children.