

*Family Allowances Act*

population in Canada. At page 93 of the departmental report which I have indicated I find this:

It is the opinion of the Indian affairs branch that family allowances have been a very important factor in the continued improvement noted in school attendance and enrolment records. Reports from the Indian affairs field staff continue to indicate that the payment of family allowances is making a substantial contribution to the better health of Indian children generally.

There is no doubt whatever that, even in districts as far away from centres of civilization as that which I represent, there has been a very general improvement in conditions among the Indians. God knows, and I trust the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration (Mr. Harris) will note, that there is still ample room for improvement. At the same time we are gradually improving the lot of those people whom, for many years, we failed to help to any great extent. During the last fifteen or twenty years, I believe, we have developed a social conscience which has extended to our Indians as well as to our other countrymen.

I do not know to what extent the improvement among the Indians is due to family allowances, but there can be no doubt that they are a contributing factor. There are of course other contributing factors this government has brought into operation, and there are other things for which perhaps the government cannot take a great deal of credit.

After all, there has been an extension of civilization westward and northward. As I said before, there has been a development of our social conscience, apparent not only among politicians but among others as well.

Coming to the resolution, I would point out that there is a point which may or may not be profitable or advantageous at election time, but which in my view should now be emphasized by someone. In Canada the prime responsibility for the children still rests with the parents. If we should reach a stage when the first responsibility for bringing up children passes from the parents to the state, we will have come dangerously close to the moral, or immoral, system adopted in Russia.

At the same time it is only right that we should consider the basic reasons for the inauguration of family allowances. Put briefly, as I understand it, the situation is this: A single man may work side by side with a married man who has three children. They may be doing exactly the same kind of work and, under our industrial system, both will draw the same pay. Yet one has far greater responsibilities than the other.

[Mr. Applewhaite.]

So in our governmental system we have endeavoured to assist in equalizing the burden.

The family allowance cheque is not the only assistance given. A far greater assistance, proportionately, is given by income tax deduction allowances for children. There are other and less important forms of assistance, such as medical deductions permitted in respect of members of a family. At the same time I think we are in danger of overlooking what I consider a basic and important fact, that family allowances were not introduced for the purpose of having the state bring up or assume the responsibility for feeding and clothing our children; they were brought in, as was the dependents' deduction for income tax purposes, in order to bring about a levelling of burdens and responsibilities.

In so far as the actual proposition put forward in the resolution is concerned, I suppose it is a tying of the family allowances to the cost of living. The resolution does not say so in so many words and I do not want to distort the resolution, but it reads in part: —increasing the amounts paid under the Family Allowances Act to the extent necessary to compensate for the increase in the cost of living . . .

To all intents and purposes I think that is tying the family allowance cheque to the cost of living. Should a catastrophe occur and a depression of major proportion engulf us, and as a result the cost of living be reduced to one-half of what it is now, I assume the hon. member would not be able to object to reducing family allowances to the same extent.

I would be strongly against a fluctuating family allowance cheque, one which would go up a few cents, down a dollar, up a few cents and down a few cents as the cost of living varied. I speak of this with knowledge as I have discussed it with heads of families. They tell me that they are able to budget better with a fixed dollar income than they would be with a fluctuating cheque, even though prices might vary. I do not know why that should be. Perhaps it indicates one of the shortcomings of human nature, but I am told that a steady income is easier to spend in advance, to budget, than is a fluctuating cheque which might always be a little behind the variations in prices.

There is another aspect of this matter which I think the hon. member for Assiniboia (Mr. Argue) has inadvertently overlooked. No one can argue that there has not been a tremendous increase in the cost of living, but that has been accompanied by an increase in prosperity, that is, by an increase in the funds in the hands of our