

Family Allowances

member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie), he said that this program is not a welfare program. Well, it now appears that when it comes to welfare recipients the family allowance program is considered as a welfare program, at least in Ontario, and this may be the case in several other provinces in this country. In dealing with Ontario, at least we are dealing with one very significant proportion of the population of this country. So, it would appear there is the very real possibility that the people who need the help the most under this program will get the least. Why should this be?

Well, it appears there is a concern among those people who are considered the experts in respect of social benefits and social welfare to the effect that the working poor should receive at least as much or more income as the people on social welfare. At first this might appear to be a very legitimate concern, but let me tell you, Mr. Speaker, that is not a concern that goes far enough. Of course, we will all agree that people who work, no matter how low their income may be, should either equal or surpass in income the people on social benefits. But that is not the only concern we should have. I, for one, do not want to be drawn into an argument as to whether the working poor are more deserving than the people on social welfare. The kind of argument I want to become involved in is whether the working poor and the people on social welfare both receive their due share of the national income. If we let ourselves become involved in this kind of niggly little debate—not niggly but niggardly debate—in which we wonder whether the persons on social benefits are receiving more than the working poor, then I suggest we will lose sight of the main or stated intention behind this bill.

The stated intention should be fairly obvious. It is that this is a program designed to help redistribute income in this country. It is very obvious to the minister and many other observers of the Canadian economic scene that there are people who receive much more than their fair share of the national income and others who receive much less. It is very obvious to practically everyone in this House that we cannot let the private enterprise system run by itself. We need something called welfare or social insurance programs to get rid of the worst deprivations of the private enterprise system. The figures are startling to anyone. Yesterday the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre quoted figures cited by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent) which indicate how staggering the difference is in the incomes received by the various sectors of our population.

For example, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre stated that the first quintile, the bottom 20 per cent, of income workers in this country in 1971 in terms of family income received 3.6 per cent of the national income and that the fifth quintile, the top 20 per cent, received 43 per cent of the national income. These are staggering figures indeed. They become even more depressing if we look at the figures for income distribution through the years. Rather than see the situation improve we see it deteriorate. It is 3.6 per cent now for the bottom fifth of the population in income terms. It was 4.4 per cent in 1965, 4.2 per cent in 1967 and is now 3.6 per cent. On the other hand, the top fifth which now receives 43.3 per cent has progressed from a figure of 41.5 per cent in 1965 to 42 per cent in 1967, to 42.6 per cent in 1969 and 43.3 per cent now.

[Mr. Harney.]

So, in spite of all the mythology to the effect that too much money is being spent by government on social programs, social insurance programs, old age pensions, what is called generically welfare by some of the members to my right, in spite of all this, the fact still remains that the distribution of income in Canada is not moving toward equality but is moving toward greater and greater inequality. That is why I must ask myself if the present program proposed by the minister will change this trend. Sure, there will be a distribution, but will it be in the right direction? I say that if the provinces are to be allowed to adjust downwards social welfare benefits, whether they do that by taking into account the fact that families will be receiving \$20 per child and will therefore reduce the benefit themselves or whether they calculate this new \$20 per month per child as a form of income for a family, then we will not alter this trend toward greater and greater inequality in distribution of income in this country.

I know the minister would probably say the figures are accurate because they are from Statistics Canada. We all have reason to believe in Statistics Canada. He could also add that these figures do not take into account the programs which have been initiated in the past number of years or the fact that now there is considerably more public housing in certain sectors of the country, that this is a way of alleviating the condition in which some people find themselves and that there are medicare programs across the country as well as hospitalization programs. I see the minister nodding. He has made suggestions to this effect before. The people who comprise what might be called the professional welfare community in the country would agree with him.

Let us get back to the real world and consider some other points. In many provinces although there is medicare and hospitalization people must pay for this. In the province of Ontario, where I live, the combined medicare and hospitalization premium is staggering. Many a worker who thinks this premium is paid for by his company does not realize that this is simply part of his pay. It is part of his pay that is negotiated in the contract he gets from his employer. Another factor ought to be considered in this real world we are looking at. Many of the programs that have been instituted and implemented in the past 20 years are in a sense stop-gap programs. They have been implemented and improved because the costs felt by our citizens in those areas were becoming unbearable.

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Let me cite, for example, hospitalization. The costs of hospitalization have gone up enormously, and so has the need for hospitalization because the way of life of Canadian citizens now is totally different from the way they lived a generation or two ago. So what in effect is happening is that in spite of the fact that these programs have been initiated and improved, the real situation of the deprived, of the poor in this country, in relation to their fellow citizens has not changed.

The reason there are so many people in my riding living in Ontario housing is that there is no more housing being produced for them by the private housing industry. While 40, 50 or 60 years ago the housing industry in the city of Toronto was able to produce good, solid, durable, decent, clean housing for the working people of that city, it is no