

Family Week

The open agenda of this government is to save money. Therefore I see no reason why the House should have any confidence, even if it were a good move to get rid of the family allowance program, that the government would redirect those moneys in the manner which they suggest they intend, that is, by making them more available to the needy. I am not suggesting that it is a good move to get rid of the family allowance program. In all likelihood that money would go to finance the scheme we were debating this afternoon.

The House can concretely express its support of the family, not just by voting for the establishment of family week, but by reiterating its commitment to the family allowance program. The government should affirm the value of family life and not just think of the family allowance program as a method of distributing income. That was not the original intention of the program.

We tread on very dangerous conceptual ground when we criticize the family allowance program for not redistributing income, because that was not the basic intention of universal programs. The basic intention was to provide services to all Canadians, whether it be in education, family life, a decent life for elderly citizens, health care or whatever we chose to provide to everyone, because they are collectively valued. To begin to see the family allowance program as simply a welfare program or a way of income redistribution is a serious mistake. The House should reflect seriously upon the remarks which I have made in this context. When we begin to tamper with the family allowance program, we begin to tamper with the affirmation of family life in Canada.

Mr. Eric Ferguson (Saint John): Mr. Speaker, I should like to congratulate the hon. member for Madawaska-Victoria (Mr. Corbin) on his presentation. I must say in all sincerity that I was surprised, shocked, disappointed, and saddened by the remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg-Birds Hill (Mr. Blaikie). His remarks were nothing but complete political, complete negativism on a subject which is of great concern to every Canadian.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

● (1740)

Mr. Ferguson: I want you to know, sir, that unlike the previous speaker I look to the future with great confidence, and I suggest that is being non-political.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak on this bill regarding the importance of the family. The first question one must ask is, what is a family? The World Book Dictionary describes a family in the following words: (1) father, mother and their children; (2) the children of the father and mother; (3) a group of people living in the same house; and (4), a group of related people or tribe. I am almost prepared to say something about that last definition but, being unpolitical at this particular time, which I think is appropriate, I will stop there.

However, a family is more than just a collection of people living in the same house. A strong healthy family is one in

which all the members love one another, are concerned about each other, and are faithful to each other. They are good to each other when times are tough. That is what I call a family and what I understand to be a family. A family is strong when the members interact with each other, experience similar situations together, and develop a sense of purpose in life together.

I suppose I could say that I speak with a degree of authority. I come from a family of 14. I am the thirteenth child, and I am proud to say that I have seven children of my own and a wife who does an excellent job with me in looking after them.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Ferguson: By virtue of this I believe I can speak on this bill with a degree of understanding and feeling. I can talk about my own family and about growing up. I can talk about my own dad, living in the country and how concerned he was. He taught me how to set rabbit snares, to go to Sunday school, and how to behave. He and my mother taught me what values were. My father was a lumberman who worked hard to bring up a family of 14 in the depression days. That was not a very easy job. Being the thirteenth with a mother who is still living today, I know what a family is. I speak with confidence about that, just as I speak with confidence about Canada.

My father was not only a lumberman, he was also a county councillor in that rural area. He served on the county council for a period of 35 years, paying his way for the place he occupied in order to make this place a better place for people like myself.

Many years ago Abraham Lincoln talked about respect for the law, and that is something dear to my heart. He suggested that young people could be taught to respect and understand the law. He said that parents should teach their children; mothers with children at the breast, in Sunday school, in high school and in universities. The time has now come, and it is the mission of you, me and each one of us, every citizen in Canada, to stand up and teach respect for the family, understanding for the family, and time to encourage families to work for the family. If we do not we are going to be in real trouble.

In present day society the traditional family with a mother and a father is changing drastically. We now find more single parent families with a parent who has to work in order to meet the day to day expenses of keeping the family together. The child or children are now cared for by babysitters, by grandparents or, in many cases, by themselves. My background brought to my attention many cases of children who had to look after themselves. We all know what happens too often in those cases. We all know where many of them end up. In the majority of cases they end up before the courts, in our jails and penitentiaries. It is for this reason that we must care more.

The child has a very special need and it is essential for parents like you and I to experience things together with our families and children and to recognize those needs. Many of the fathers and mothers in this nation are not aware of this. This does not have to cost a great deal of money, but it does