

Family Allowances

rates have been falling quite dramatically. For example, in Canada the number of live births per 1,000 of population fell from 26.1 to 16.8 in the period 1961 to 1971. There is, therefore, no evidence showing a strong statistical relation between the existence of a family allowance policy and the rise or fall of the birth rate. For example, some European countries have quite generous family allowance programs, yet there has been no rise in the birth rate. On the other hand, in African and Asian countries, where family allowances are unknown, the birth rate remains high. Here in Canada, the province of Quebec since 1967 has paid family allowances over and above those paid by the federal government. The Quebec government has been the only one to do this, yet the birth rate in Quebec has dropped from 26.1 live births per thousand in 1961 to 14.8 in 1971. The birth rate in Quebec is now the lowest of all Canadian provinces.

• (1650)

I realize that there are other factors that also have to be taken into account in assessing population trends. However, I believe it is reasonable to conclude that the presence or absence of family allowance does not appear to affect to any degree the birth rate of a country. In addition, one cannot argue, in all humanity, that because some persons may think certain parents ought not to have children, we should allow children to suffer from poverty and malnutrition.

It seems to me that other measures should be and are being adopted to encourage family planning. For example, the Department of National Health and Welfare has set up a program of public information and education on family planning. In addition, it is promoting the training of professionals and non-professionals who are engaged in providing family planning services as well as supporting family planning research projects. It is through these better programs of public information and education that we are attempting to come to grips with family planning. It is through the family allowance program that we are hoping to improve the living standards of the present generation of Canadian children who, through no fault of their own, may find themselves living in conditions of poverty.

That is one of the questions raised about the program; another is the claim that the increase in family allowances will require higher taxes. Let me reiterate what was said in the working paper on social security in Canada and what the Minister of National Health and Welfare has said repeatedly. The implementation of the new over-all approach to social security, including higher family allowances, will take place over time "within existing levels of taxation". The government has assigned a high priority to social reform. It seems to me that this is one of the very significant accomplishments of the present government and parliament. This means that, in deciding each year how to spend the tax dollars it has collected, the government will be assigning a great deal of importance to ensuring that appropriate amounts of money are allocated to fund the new social security programs, such as higher family allowances.

I conclude by saying that I commend the government for bringing in this measure to increase family allowances. I also share the interest of those hon. members who want

this measure to pass without delay so that higher family allowance payments can be received by the mothers of this country to help them and their children, hopefully as soon as next month.

Mr. Cyril Symes (Sault Ste. Marie): Mr. Speaker, my comments on Bill C-223 will be brief. I support this bill to increase the amount paid for a child under 16 years to \$12 beginning October 1, effective till January next. At present, as we all know, the family allowance payment for a child under 10 is \$6, and for a child between the ages of 10 and 16 it is \$8. The increase to \$12 will not be taxable, and next January an average of \$20 per child will be paid.

Although a newer member of this House, I have been looking with interest at what has been the Liberal government's policy on family allowances over the years, especially during the last majority government and the present one, and have been struck by the amazing number of reversals of policy that this Liberal government and its predecessor have undertaken. In 1972, when the Liberals had a majority government, they introduced a new family income security program. They tried to do what the hon. member for Thunder Bay (Mr. Penner) has just said was not the aim of the family allowance system; they tried to use the family allowance system as an anti-poverty program. Under that proposal, which thank goodness never did get through the House, a higher amount of family allowance would have been given to low income families and a reduced amount to middle and upper income families. Under that plan some hundreds of thousands of upper income families would have received no family allowance.

That plan was rejected. It was rejected because the benefits to be paid the poorer families were inadequate and the benefits for middle income families were unrealistic. For example, a family with an income of \$11,000 having five children would receive only 75 per cents per child, which was absolutely ridiculous. The NDP opposed that plan for many reasons, as mentioned by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent). We maintained that family allowances should be universal.

We are now in 1973 and the Liberals have been chastised by the electorate and now form a minority government. A while ago the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) grandly announced that, beginning in January of 1974, family allowances would be increased to an average of \$20 per child and would be subject to tax. Why that change of heart? Besides the obvious foolishness of the FISP plan, the government is now in a minority situation and realizes that the NDP holds the balance of power. It knows that since NDP opposed the previous plan, it will certainly oppose its reintroduction. Thus the government has come up with this \$20 family allowance plan commencing next January.

Then this month the government has introduced yet another plan to increase family allowances to \$12 per child beginning October 1. Why this about face, this further change? The reason is that the cost of living has risen so dramatically, and the NDP told the government a few weeks ago that an immediate increase in family allowance was one small way to help compensate families and enable them to meet the rising cost of living. But as is typical of Liberal government policy, it is too little, too late.