

Can the minister tell me to what extent the government is qualified to monitor what is best for mothers? The most fundamental institution we have in this country is the institution of the family and the integrity of the family unit. The thing which I find disturbing in this bill is not only the principle of redistribution which the hon. member refers to, but the intervention of the government into the sanctity of the family unit. I would like to have the minister explain that last sentence to me. To what extent is she willing to carry that out? The minister continues at page 673:

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre asked me that question. In all honesty I think members on the other side could agree with me that family allowances, no matter the economic circumstances of a family, are a right, by which the government shows that the nation is responsible for the well-being of . . . children—

When has it become the government's responsibility to look after children? If the government would like to do its job properly, what it needs to do is unshackle the parents so they can do their job. Perhaps we should restructure the tax system, not according to principles which the minister is introducing in this bill, but in such a way that the burdens are taken away from the parents so that they can spend their time bringing up the children.

SIN numbers have been the topic of questions and answers and repartee in this House, and I would like to ask the minister—and I am not punning on the word this time—whether the growing use of the SIN number is not part of the background, in the government's mind, of setting up the machinery for expediting guaranteed annual income. Would the minister answer those questions?

Miss Bégin: The first three points the hon. member has raised are of a philosophical nature. He has referred to three different concepts—reform, universality and redistribution. The hon. member, with whom I sat on the committee on immigration, is a great philosopher and well versed in rhetoric.

With regard to the word "reform", it is reform in the sense that I explained previously, in the sense of the tax system. It is a major reform. Reform is a normal thing on the government side, and we are very proud of the reform in this bill. We feel that it is a good reform and a major one.

The hon. member asked how far I am willing to go with regard to the word "universality". We are talking about family allowances and a universal program for every child in Canada. In terms of the money given out for each individual child, it is a modest amount, but the total expenditure amounts to \$2 billion. I would ask the hon. member to read the first chapter of the report by the Royal Commission on the Status of Women, which outlines the historical development of the economy of the family. At one time children of ages 12, 13 or 14 were considered productive assets, but that has changed and, therefore, so has the economics of the family. Perhaps the hon. member forgot that I had mentioned these aspects of family life.

When the government gives a family allowance to the families of the nation, it acknowledges that children are essential to this country. It decides that in dividing up the total pie

of government expenditures so much will go for national defence, agriculture, wharves and fishing, and that a portion will go to children!

That is what we are saying. This universality has been maintained. It does not help to pretend that it was not questioned in many quarters in Canada and it will be questioned again. This government believes in the universality of family allowances, and when I spoke of the best of selectivity and universality, I very clearly defined the new reform. We want to maintain a relative universality for every child. We are redirecting to those children in need much larger sums of money than to the ordinary children of Canada who are in good economic circumstances. That is what I said.

● (2142)

On the third point, redistribution of wealth, I will go very fast. The hon. members asked how far is the minister ready to go. That is very, very easy to answer. I will go as far as necessary to make sure that no longer will we have in Canada 600,000 families with a total of close to two million children living below the poverty line.

Fourth, the hon. member did not quote me correctly; he forgot part of the sentence. He was referring to that part of my speech where I said we would monitor the program to see if changes were needed in future years. That was said in reference to an annual payment versus several instalments. If I recall correctly, and the hon. member can correct me if I am wrong, I said that it is very important to me that mothers be listened to, and that we hear their voices, not only the voices of all the social workers of the country. I do not mean that social workers do not do their job, they do a good job, but I would like mothers to speak for themselves, if possible. We will create the program first if hon. members pass the bill. We want to hear from mothers who will be living with that program whether they prefer to receive several instalments rather than one large payment.

In any event, for the first year the tax system being used is not a system geared to making several payments a year; the current mechanism provides for only one yearly payment. That was the context.

As for "SIN", which is the favourite topic tonight, I do not know what the hon. member thought first; perhaps he thought there was a monster on the horizon! He asked if the government was planning—I missed some parts of the sentence—to find some hidden way to introduce a guaranteed annual income through the use of a SIN number. I fail to see the connection because then I would have to have the SIN number right away, because it would mean that we would have the guaranteed annual income. The social insurance number, as I said earlier, and maybe the member was not in the House, is required as per section 237 of the Income Tax Act. If we use the tax system, I would invite mothers who do not have one already to get one.

I just want to mention that I do not want to mix different things here, but when an hon. member asked this question the other day, members of the House had just received their pay