

leader of the Social Credit party and the letter is signed by R. G. L. Fairweather.

The committee and the House have a right to hear a response from the government as to just how it intends to meet the very serious implications set out by the commissioner with respect to the direction this bill is taking in determining family income and the impact it will have on the rights of women and, especially, women as outlined in the bill—those women who are in the home and who are not covered by the bill.

There were a number of questions raised during the course of the debate which should be put into focus at this point in the committee stage of the bill, since we are now dealing with clause 1. It is well to remember that the welfare ministers of the provinces, when they met in Nova Scotia last September, expressed concern that there had not been consultation with them regarding this bill. Has there been consultation since that time, considering there are two provinces which have their own child allowance programs, and what impact will this bill have on those two provinces?

We would also like to know if there has been consultation with the provinces with respect to the impact this bill will have on provincial social assistance programs. Does the government have the assurance that people who qualify for the special tax allowance under this bill will not be penalized in terms of social welfare programs under provincial jurisdiction? That is an important point and one which the committee is entitled to be satisfied on.

The question has already been raised regarding the rebaters, who will have a field day unless there is special provision made to protect the recipients of the benefits of this bill from those people. There are a number of things in this bill which are causing us trouble. We support the bill naturally, but while we question the way the government is going, we do feel nevertheless it is a bill that tends to address a problem in this country, namely, the disparities of income with respect to the present social welfare program of the government. For example, we are dealing here with a negative income tax principle and in my estimation a number of people will be filing tax returns for the first time. These people will be unfamiliar with the forms and we can anticipate that there will be a number of errors. We would expect, under normal circumstances, that there would be a substantial educational program involved because we are dealing here with the 1978 tax year. We are talking about this bill becoming operative in this tax year, and the returns will be based on the 1978 taxation year. So we can expect all kinds of administrative problems in this area. We are wondering, therefore, what steps the government proposes to take with respect to meeting these problems.

● (2022)

Then there was the question which was raised in the House today dealing with the social insurance number. Many of these people do not have a social insurance number. They will be required to have one, and we know the administrative process in applying for and receiving a social insurance number is often slow. A lot of people are not familiar with this number

Family Allowances

and do not know how to go about applying for it. To a large extent we are dealing with low income earners, people who are not familiar with the tax bureaucracy of the government, with income tax returns, with the social insurance number and all that it entails. There is no information presently available in the 1978 guide that accompanies tax returns. Consequently, some kind of an advertising or educational program will be needed in order to familiarize people with their entitlement under the bill, how they can qualify and meet the requirements of the act. In this respect we are wondering how the government intends to meet that problem.

We will have other questions with respect to the technical aspects of the bill, Mr. Chairman. My colleague the hon. member for York-Simcoe will have questions with respect to those aspects of the bill, and I know the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance is well able to satisfy the committee in this regard. Officials of the Department of Finance are with him, and these are questions we will anticipate as we get into the bill.

To conclude my opening remarks on clause 1 of the bill, I believe the committee is entitled to some response from the government with respect to the legitimate concerns expressed to the Minister of Finance today in a letter from the chief commissioner of the Canadian Human Rights Commission. I hope that either the Minister of National Health and Welfare or the parliamentary secretary will address herself or himself to this letter at the outset.

[*Translation*]

Miss Bégin: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member raised—and I took note of his questions—seven matters he would like to be clarified. The main question concerns clause 1 of the bill and I will do my best to answer it. Referring me to his earlier speech on the recommendations of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women he asked what we are doing for homemaking spouses and their participation in the Canada Pension Plan. While his point is not too relevant to the bill before us, I shall answer it briefly.

First, most of the recommendations of the report, with a federal thrust, have been implemented. The report recommended a study on housewives participation in the Canada Pension Plan, as it is in essence a pension plan that applies to workers. It is based on employer-employee contributions. So, the government studied this problem under my predecessor and decided after many public and private consultations to maintain the nature of the Canada Pension Plan based on a double contribution and to make only amendments that would not change its character.

I think the hon. member will recall for instance that we proposed for a mother who decides to stay home to raise her young child a so-called drop-out provision so that her contributory earnings would not be reduced in the years for which she gets no salary, but that provision was rejected for all Canada because of the refusal of Ontario to sign the agreement. I only wish to say that the problem of housewives participation in the