

Family Income Security Plan

universality was first exercised. The Conservative party of that day was much opposed to it. Even after this House had passed the universal old age pension legislation, the Senate turned it down. The second House, the House of sober second thought, believed that a measure of this kind would destroy the country. The same was said with respect to the family allowance payments on a universal basis.

I would point out there has been no great outcry on the part of the Canadian public in favour of the change the government is now proposing. There have, however, been many complaints from those who have been receiving benefits on behalf of their children about the inadequacy of the allowance. Time and time again the government has been asked to increase the allowances, at least to the point at which they would be in line with the increase in the cost of living. One of the questions frequently asked of me during political campaigns is: Where do you stand on the issue of family allowances? It is asked by representatives of a group called Union d'Électeurs, a forerunner of the Creditiste party who often attend political meetings for the purpose. I have always been able to say, truthfully, that I am in favour of increasing the family allowance. I believe that at least the amount should be kept in line with its purchasing power when first introduced. Revision should be carried out periodically, in fact an escalator clause should be built into the scheme. If we pass the amendment in the name of the leader of my party we shall only have done what many people in this country have been demanding, that is, to bring the family allowance payments in line with the increase in the cost of living.

Much has been said about the problems which members of parliament have been encountering in connection with programs administered by the government. I was interested to hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) tell the House yesterday that over the years he had received very few complaints about the administration of the family allowance program. I can recall only a few instances of my own knowledge, and these difficulties usually involved something other than the benefits themselves. They arose because a child who had reported he did not intend to return to school decided, later, that he would do so, or they arose from questions concerning the guardianship of the child—who should, in fact, receive the cheque, and so on. So, while there have been a few minor problems, they have not been the kind which develop as a result of a too bureaucratic administration. The minister is to be congratulated on the way in which this branch has been administered. It has been easy to get replies from the department, which indicates to me that the staff is sitting waiting for telephone calls, and are able to deal with inquiries immediately.

If we embark on this computerized nightmare which many hon. members have foreseen, the staff will need to treble in size. Before the minister even considers it, I should like him to read a little booklet which should be on the desks of all administrators in the civil service—it should certainly be on the desk of every cabinet minister. It is entitled "Up the Organization". He will find therein a section on computers in which the authors say that anyone changing over to computers should be prepared for a long period of manual checking of everything which is done by the computer. The other day there was an

interruption of the power supply to parliament. It caused very little interruption to this particular institution. But in Belleville, where a computer is installed, 12 hours were lost as a result of that interruption. This meant that instead of a man getting his cheque on Thursday he had to wait until Monday, and then only if he was lucky. This is the kind of problem which will be encountered in connection with family allowances if we put the program on a computer system.

I am sure the whole country was shocked to learn recently how poorly our tax system operates. We were shocked to hear the Minister of Finance say it was not possible to raise personal exemptions by \$500 and still expect to run the country, because so much money was flowing in from the lower end of the tax structure. This is why we have written into our amendment a proposal that the necessary tax changes be made to ensure that maximum benefit is received by those to whom the allowances are directed. It is certainly not our desire that this money be given to the rich or to people who have no need of it. Nor is it our desire to give it to those who will find it detrimental to their total tax position. The government seems determined to do things in the most complicated way possible, though it would be easy to provide \$15 to the entire group we wish to help, \$20 to the second group, and sufficient money to the third group to take care of education costs. I once earned an income which would put me in the middle income category, yet my wife could always make good use of the family allowance. I had three boys and it was very seldom that she was able to buy a pair of shoes or some other item of clothing for the children without her having to take money from the family budget. These items were needed by the children and were well used. This sort of thing occurs right across the whole community. Yet this government wants to divide the people into the haves and have nots.

• (1630)

Not a day goes by that I do not receive a letter dealing with some problem in connection with the old age supplement. For example, someone has a burial fund which puts him over the limit. Although he does not have sufficient money to live on, since he has money put away to bury him, it means he cannot get the supplement. If the minister employs an additional 500 people to administer the program, how close is this going to come to carrying the total expenditure when you discount the amount received back through the income tax system, even as it is now? As you know, expenditure has a revolving effect, and it soon gets back into the taxation system. I should like to know whether the cost of the 500 people that are to be hired will exceed the savings that will be made.

Personally, I have always thought family allowances should be increased. I thought that it was a demogrant which served a purpose for the young people and in many cases gave them an equal opportunity. In my area two kinds of youngster go to high school. There are those from the depressed rural areas and there are those from the urban community. This small allowance made the difference whether they were able to dress so that they felt equal to other kids or were not. Although society has changed today, what has not changed is the requirement to make application for assistance if you are in need.

[Mr. Peters.]