

Family Income Security Plan

Mr. Fairweather: Thank you.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, may I ask the minister a question? In talking about administrative problems, he said that there have not been many complaints or problems connected with old age pensioners receiving supplementary benefits. Would he not agree that there is a vast difference between people receiving the old age pension, who have a relatively stable income, and working people and farmers whose incomes fluctuate as a result of unemployment, pay increases and other factors, and that therefore there will be many problems for people in the latter category in figuring out what their benefit level will be because their incomes may change from month to month?

Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, the recovery rates under FISP will be in a closely compressed bracket. Without doubt, there are considerable variations in connection with the guaranteed income supplement and, of course, there are bound to be great variations in the family income security plan, if for no other reason than that more people will be applying than is the case under GIS. I am trying to point out that the GIS program is selective, applying to a significant number of people, one million. Although members of parliament I have talked to have complained about benefit levels, and so on, they have not mentioned many serious complaints with respect to administration. That shows that this country, in advance perhaps of any other country in the free world, has been able to use the income test and not the means test in an appropriate way so that we are able to protect the dignity of people and still give them a supplementary income on which to survive.

Mr. Marshall: Mr. Speaker, may I ask a question? Perhaps the minister would clarify something that worries me. The best way of asking my question is by giving an example. Let us say that a man is earning \$4,500 a year and is getting maximum benefits. Let us say, also, that his wife works for part of the year and that the family still gets maximum benefits. She may begin working six months after the beginning of the year. Then let us say that next year she loses her job and the family's income drops to \$4,500. How will the government recover any overpayment? There is bound to be confusion because people will have to repay certain benefits received in the previous year.

Mr. Munro: If I understood the hon. member's question correctly, let me say this. If because of hardship in the current year a man decides to exercise his option on the basis of his current year's income, and if his income jumps back up in that same year, recovery will take place. This is all done by computer. A similar sort of thing happens in connection with the guaranteed income supplement for the aged. Speaking of the guaranteed income supplement for the aged, in cases where we had to effect recoveries in the following year, many of the complaints did not concern so much the recoveries themselves as the fact that we tried to make recoveries within too limited a time frame. Since then we have spaced out the time and minimized the payments; in other words, the monthly payments necessary to make recoveries are lower. By so doing we have effectively dealt with most of the complaints.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Henry Latulippe (Compton): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct a question to the hon. Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Since the hon. minister intends to solve the problem of poverty in Canada, I should like to ask him how he can do so by taking money away from those who do not have enough already.

[*English*]

Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, I explained at considerable length in my speech the precise answer to that question. If the hon. member did not listen to it, I hope he will read it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Is the hon. member rising for the purpose of asking a question?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): No, Mr. Speaker; I want to make a speech.

[*Translation*]

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, I should like to take part in the debate on this amendment as I sincerely believe it deserves our attention since the bill before us is not entirely adequate. This piece of legislation was not prepared well enough; in other words, it would be a good thing to accept this amendment even if we have to deal later on with another bill on that subject.

The reasons that lead me to support this amendment, Mr. Speaker, are the following: first of all, the basic problem dealt with in this bill does not seem to be solved adequately.

As for the inadequateness of clause 6, I have already proved it in a speech on the motion for second reading and I shall not go back to it.

Still, one of the factors which leads me to support the amendment is the inadequateness of the amounts provided for in respect of allowances. The vast majority of my colleagues have already spoken against selectivity being applied to family allowances. I share their views; consequently, that point should be reviewed.

Other major reasons should also be considered and lead the minister to postpone study of the bill, so that a better bill might be prepared.

Mr. Speaker, this bill deals with a constitutional matter. I believe the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker) has already mentioned it in a speech, and that the bill, because we are selecting those who will receive the allowances, becomes anticonstitutional, and that it was through an amendment to the very Constitution of Canada that the federal government stepped into this field of exclusively provincial jurisdiction.

Now, the amendment that had to be proposed when family allowances were introduced gave all Canadian families, without any distinction, the opportunity of receiving family allowances. Consequently, by accepting Bill C-170 as drafted, we are running counter to the Constitution itself. More especially, Mr. Speaker, since we are dealing with a matter about which there are great differences of opinion among the various parts of the country. We all know that Quebec does not accept that system and