

Family Allowances

Earlier I was listening to the hon. member for Lafontaine-Rosemont (Mr. Lachance) who delivered an excellent speech, there is no doubt about it. But I would like to ask a few questions. For example, how do you explain that a government which was so attached to the principle of universality decided to put it aside? Not that I blame them for that but I would like to make sure that this change which seems to me necessary in the present context is a real change of attitude in the government, as we can see it in many other areas.

I regret also that the government has not though it necessary to discuss those proposals officially with the provinces. I do not think that the government of Canada would have lost anything in doing so and we know of two provinces which have their own family allowance systems, Alberta and Quebec. Of course these allowances are far less generous than those of the federal government. But nevertheless I think it would have been good, particularly in the present context, to submit those proposals to the provinces, and expose those ideas and those changes in an attempt to get the support of the provinces on a matter which affects a fundamental institution of our society, the family itself.

This decision has probably been taken as rapidly as all the others which dealt with budgetary reductions. In recent weeks we have observed with interest but with a certain amount of discouragement that most of the decisions have been taken without any serious analysis. Of course this has prompted us to make certain comments which were often negative and which the government so far has failed to answer. I cannot help thinking of the true motives of such measures. We might wonder why they waited so long. I remember that, all of a sudden last summer the Prime Minister felt it necessary to delay the general election to tell us how important it was to bring in economic measures because he had just realized, when he came back from Bonn, that the country was in a difficult situation and that he had to propose job creation measures. Those bills, the increase in income supplement and in family allowances are important, of course.

This does not quite jibe with the statements made by the Prime Minister that he would create jobs in the country. It is not quite with such pieces of legislation—nor with the bill asking for authority to borrow \$17 billion, which we finally gave for an amount of about \$7 billion—that we shall create jobs in the short term. Canadians probably think in the present context that—when we examine the political context—the government thought perhaps it was profitable to play the trick with the \$20 after the trick of the \$85 they played last summer, and after the increase in family allowances before an election campaign. Other governments did so before, and I am forced to recognize that it may be a tactic I know, which is still used today, which disappoints me. I remember very well the principles which motivated the responsible minister at the very beginning of a political career, and I am convinced that this minister would have rejected any such argument or insinuation

[Mr. La Salle.]

that it might be well to introduce a measure which could be fascinating for the so-called poorer people, to try to gain their support in an election campaign. Again, strangely enough, that will happen a month and a half or two before the next election. I suggest that we should warn the Canadian people not to fall in such traps. I repeat that we support this bill and that we shall vote for it. We would have done so a year ago because I feel the needs at that time were as pressing as they are today.

Mr. Speaker, I listened to the hon. member for Lafontaine-Rosemont who very skillfully tried to convince us of this government's concern for social legislation designed to help the have-nots and low income groups. He said that the Liberal policy was charity-oriented and one of concern for those deprived Canadians.

I would like to know why this government feels compelled to devise new social legislation and why, in order to enable Canadians to make ends meet, it has to be so generous, spending millions on unemployment insurance benefits, family allowances, old age pensions. Maybe we should remind them that if they had devised an industrial strategy well-adjusted to modern times, these so-called social measures would not be necessary today. Because of the economic mess, this government now has to turn to piecemeal solutions, giving away small amounts, \$10, \$85, \$20, and this, just before the election. We will not say that it is dishonest because it cannot be proved.

The minister could have introduced this legislation 12 or 15 months ago because the situation has been deteriorating in Canada for a few years now. For the past five years, members on this side have been warning the government of the dangers looming ahead, but unfortunately, we were laughed at. But now the government realizes that we were right. They have come up with social measures that I really approve of. I must say that the government has to show some imagination to allow people to collect unemployment benefits without having to work, but they may have broken the record in this area. But with regard to showing imagination in relation to an industrial strategy and the recovery of the Canadian economy, I think this could be dealt with at length and I think that the evidence is there that it is a failure. This is why today I do not wish to dwell on this issue but I think I had to underline it. First it is rather strange to see how the introduction of this legislation was timed. Is it that the government did not understand a couple of years ago that this was an urgent matter then? By taking action then they could have dismissed any allegations that they are trying to buy off votes by introducing this measure.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. La Salle: Of course the hon. member for Lévis (Mr. Guay) has not thought about that but he may still use this legislation as an argument come the next election. Perhaps he will say to his voters: You know we handed out a little cheque for the children and the elderly now get an extra \$20. Yet