

### Family Allowances

Tonight we are discussing a bill which uses the tax system to create a tax credit associated with children. I want to confirm that we are not creating any discrimination or regressivity in this system, that being the other word the hon. member used. Eligibility is not based on marital status. I will repeat that because the hon. member said I did not explain it. Maybe I was not clear enough the first time. Eligibility has nothing to do with marital status. Anyone with children can receive the credit, be they single, divorced, widowed, married, separated or deserted. The credit is attached to the income of the family unit, which means two parents or one parent, whatever the circumstances of a given family, and there is no relation to joint filings of joint tax returns. This relates to parents, one or two, with children in a family unit who do not benefit from having enough money.

The purpose of this bill is to see that the children of the nation are provided for, and the credit is available to the parents, or the parent in the singular, no matter who looks after the children, in order that the parent or parents have enough money for the children.

I want to confirm that the wife's income is not treated differently than the husband's income. Both sign a piece of paper. There is a problem of which I am aware, as are many of my colleagues in this House. We will always fight in order to correct the situation, but this bill involves the redistribution of family allowances to the children of Canada.

There are just a few more points in order to clarify this matter. The federal Advisory Council on the Status of Women approved wholeheartedly of this reform, and made that approval known by a resolution of the complete council, as well as through numerous speeches and meetings. I have met with many women's groups all of which approve of this reform. Some of them regretted, as I do and as I have said often, the reduction in universal family allowances.

That is another question. Women's groups have told me that they approve of this reform, and I am reporting that to this committee. This reform has been requested of us by all provincial and federal advisory councils. They wanted a change in the tax system from tax exemptions to tax credits. This is a step in that direction of which they approve.

Quite rightly from their point of view, as well as from mine, they regret the fact that in order to create that new credit, one of the sources of the new money was found in a reduction of family allowances. We decided to reduce universal family allowance, although slightly, and to redirect the funds to mothers and children in need.

I think that answers the various points made by the hon. member. I want to stress again that the signing of a piece of paper in respect of the incomes of both partners in a family already exists, and I am not talking about a taxation system per se. This exists already in respect of GIS as well as in respect of every Ontario senior citizen program, low rental housing and in all our welfare schemes.

**Mr. Friesen:** Mr. Chairman, before I get into the body of my remarks I would simply point out that the minister over-

[Miss Bégin.]

looked one question put by the hon. member for Kingston and the Islands, and it relates to the fact that both the husband and wife, or both parents, apparently have to sign the application form. Was that not one of the points that was made?

**Miss Bégin:** Yes, both parents.

**Mr. Friesen:** Both parents have to sign, and that seems to me to be a point of discrimination. If the mother is an adult in every other way, why is she not considered an adult in this area?

• (2132)

I have been going over with some interest the remarks made by the minister in her speech two days ago. There are three words that keep recurring in her speech. One word is the word "reform". It is a very useful term but it can also be a very intimidating term in a speech like this. The purpose of this forum is to debate, and everybody is interested in reform, but how do you initiate debate when the minister uses that word? If I wanted to object to anything the minister has said, there is an implication that I am not interested in reform. If the minister wants to initiate debate on this bill, it would be better to use a more neutral word. Perhaps a better word would be "progressive". Everybody believes in reform and progressiveness, but if you disagree with a particular aspect of the policies that issue from those terms, then you are being retrogressive and not interested in reform.

The minister has used two other words which disturb me even more. One is the word "universality" which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is so interested in and takes great pride in, but which he is unable to get his caucus to agree with him on. I would like to ask the minister just how she intends to apply this principle of universality. Does she believe that everybody can be treated alike in this matter? She said in her speech, as reported at page 670 of *Hansard*:

That is what we are proposing. In other words, we decided to put together the best of selectivity and universality.

I would like to have the minister explain how she can be a proponent of universality on one hand and selectivity on the other. The hon. minister cannot have it both ways, regardless of how good she is at gymnastics.

The third word which causes me concern is "redistribution". I take it the hon. member is referring to redistribution of wealth. How far is the minister willing to work toward the redistribution of wealth in this country? Obviously, if you talk about universality and about redistribution it infers government intervention. In fact, the minister makes a point of it at the bottom of page 672 of *Hansard*:

This is the first time that the tax system will be used to deliver benefits to people. That is why we give it that funny name—the refundable child tax credit, although it is a cheque sent to mothers. It goes through the tax system and because of that this machinery has been set up only for annual deliveries.

Here is the sentence which really scares me:

In future years it will be important to monitor what is best for, and what is wanted by, mothers.