

index. These figures point out that the average wage earner has been able to keep up with, and in fact get a little ahead of, the rise in the consumer price index.

It can be said that for most people in Canada, wage and salary increases have enabled them to adjust and even somewhat improve their standard of living. However, and this concerns all members of the House, what is true for most Canadians is certainly not true for all. This has been brought to our attention by many members, including the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby (Mr. Broadbent). Many Canadians who are in a weak bargaining position for one reason or another have suffered a great deal because of the inflationary situation which now faces them. In addition, what has been true about wage increases up to the end of the first quarter seems not to have been the case with respect to the second quarter of this year.

● (1640)

The President of the Canadian Labour Congress said recently—and I have no reason to doubt his conclusion—that Canadian workers lost one dollar a week in purchasing power in the second quarter of this year as a result of inflation. He went on to say that the workers are trapped on all economic fronts and that there are no brighter prospects before them in the foreseeable future. The proposal to increase family allowance will help all workers to offset the loss of purchasing power sustained in the second quarter of the year, and, more important, it will assist those on low incomes to provide the basic necessities of life for their families.

I should like to move, now, into another area related to family allowances. It has been said in the past that the family allowances program assists in providing equality of opportunity for all Canadian children. This view was also expressed a short while ago by the hon. member for Oshawa-Whitby, a member for whom I have great respect. He spoke as an egalitarian—I believe he would consider himself as being one. He thought the program should go further than it does and he praised it particularly on the grounds that it provided for equality of opportunity. Almost everyone agrees that the family allowance program is a good one. Middle-income families have come to accept it and expect it, and any attempt to eliminate the program or to revise it in such a way as to help only those in the greatest need would be met with strong resistance. The strength of such resistance has already been shown.

As I say, it is a good program, a program accepted by most Canadians, and one which is now being improved. But we should not claim too much for it. To say that it equalizes opportunity for Canadian children is to go further than is right or appropriate. No matter how large the payments may become in the future, and the minister has already told us there will be a further increase of up to \$20 per month per child in 1974, and even if they were to rise as high as \$40 or \$50 a month per child, we could not claim they would equalize opportunity for all children. Such a program could never move us toward an egalitarian society. I want to try to explain this point of view, and I want to do so carefully because I could easily be misunderstood.

The source of inequality of opportunity in our society is only partly economic; a large part of existing inequality is due to cultural inheritance. Much of the transmission of

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culture, in the narrow sense, occurs through the family, through the more subtle and profound influences upon the child resulting from love, integrity and family morale. This constitutes a kind of inheritance which cannot, at least for those above the subsistence level, be significantly affected by economic measures. To express these thoughts, Mr. Speaker, is not to cast any aspersion upon the family allowance program, but to place it in proper perspective. If we in the House of Commons could upgrade and improve the quality of family life simply by redistributing tax dollars, as some egalitarians would have us believe, life would be much simpler than it actually is.

Equality of opportunity is an elusive goal and we may be able to assist in modest ways by removing obstacles of one kind or another, but much of the task is entirely out of our hands. As we all know, many a child born and raised in a poorer home has achieved a good deal more and contributed more than others who were nurtured in affluence. This statement is in no way meant to be a justification of poverty or low incomes. That would be silly. But I do argue that the most important factor in equality of opportunity is the quality of parenthood, the quality which enables children to face the challenges of life without being overwhelmed by them. Economic measures alone are no substitute for the good and valuable influences exerted upon a child by his or her parents.

The history of family allowances in Canada shows us that the scheme was brought in primarily as a fiscal measure intended to bolster consumer spending. As such, the program stands on its own as a social security measure. That is what it is, and we should not wax overly eloquent by claiming any more for it in the way of equality of opportunity. The family allowance program is an integral part of the social security program because it recognizes that wage-earners are seldom in a position to relate their income to the size of their families. The birth of a child does not mean that a breadwinner is able to bargain on that account for an increase in wages or salary.

Although, as I have mentioned, the family allowance program is widely accepted throughout Canada at the present time, there are concerned people who raise some questions about it. Such questions have been raised at meetings in my constituency and it is appropriate to deal with at least two of them now. One question which has often been asked is whether this program encourages people to have more children—whether it is an incentive to procreation. It is true, as many authors have pointed out in recent works, that population growth presents a serious threat in today's world. I cannot, however, agree that the payment of higher family allowances, allowances which assist low-income families in financing child-raising, will automatically encourage people to have more children. The experience of other countries does not support such a contention.

Let me illustrate. We have been paying universal family allowances in Canada since 1945, while in the United States no such universal family allowance has been paid. Yet the birth rate in both countries has shown a remarkably similar trend. Both countries experienced fairly rapid declines in birth rates until the end of the 1930's, a small increase during World War II and a sharp increase thereafter until near the end of the 1950's. From then on, birth