

Family Income Security Plan

The minister keeps telling us, as do other ministers when we advocate increases in the old age pension, that we cannot afford these things. As I have said many times—perhaps my interjections have not always gone on the record—that is what Charlie Dunning said to J. S. Woodsworth when Mr. Woodsworth was advocating a pension of \$20 a month. We could not afford it. We could not find the money. The country would go broke. The Senate followed that argument and voted against the first bill. But we found we could pay \$20 years ago and a lot more in recent years.

• (1720)

Earlier, Mr. Speaker, I said that things have to be looked at in their totality. What one has to look at is not just the budgets of governments, whether federal or provincial, but the total wealth-producing capacity of the country. That capacity today is producing goods and services in excess of \$90 billion and if we had full employment it would be well over \$100 billion. What we have to do in this Parliament is decide on a system of priorities. In a country that can produce this much wealth, the first question is how is that wealth to be divided, to be appropriated?

Is it to go into big bank buildings, the profits of large corporations, and that sort of thing? Is it to go into huge incomes, even though there may not be that many of them, that are taxed at only 30 per cent, 35 per cent or 40 per cent? Is it to go into resource industries that pay little or no tax at all, or is this \$90 billion to \$100 billion to be used to provide a standard of living for all our people that starts with the proposition that in Canada there should not be anybody living below the poverty line?

The minister said that he was surprised we were complaining about an increased bureaucracy because he thinks we want the government to get into all kinds of things. Mr. Speaker, that was just a by-play in that first-rate political speech which he made. And that is what is wrong with him. If he has any social philosophy he should not be sitting over there with the Liberal party. What is wrong with him is his failure to realize that the job of government and the job of parliament is not to touch just a few things in our lives but to cope with this whole question of priorities and to make sure that absolutely the first claim on the wealth we are able to produce is the well-being and the standard of living of our people.

If we are to have any priorities within that general framework, Mr. Speaker, I suggest that they should be for our children and our older people. That is why we want an adequate family allowance program and an adequate social security program. It is why we put such emphasis on health care, on housing, on the things that will give people a standard of living such as they can enjoy and such as the country is able to produce.

So, Mr. Speaker, I hope I have shown the shallowness of the minister's attempt, in that speech of his that was excellent in its construction, to say that we are voting against something for the poor. Really, John, how could you say that? I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, but really how could the Minister of National Health and Welfare say that of us?

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

Mr. Munro: I would like to know what went on in your caucus.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The minister says he would like to know what went on in our caucus. I wish he had been there. He would have learned a few things.

Mr. Munro: I would like to know why you made the switch not to approve the bill on second reading.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I can tell the minister that there is another former Liberal who will be in our caucus next time, and she will enjoy it. What has to be realized is that it is possible for government to cope with this problem. It does not lie with the minister to say, as he tried to say today, that we are opposed to increased allowances for those at the bottom of the scale. We want family allowances to be increased even more than the minister proposes in this bill, but we want no strings attached.

We want unity, the kind of unity that comes from providing a decent standard of living for all our people. We believe this can be done. The time has come to say no to this regressive and restrictive measure. The time has come to strike out for a decent standard of living for all the people of this country.

[Translation]

Mr. Roch La Salle (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, I have already had the opportunity of expressing my views on Bill C-170. I would like however to make certain comments regarding the amendment before us which aims at postponing the consideration of the bill.

I have no hesitation about repeating my support of the bill which, I think, sets a commendable, justifiable and very advisable objective.

I have listened with a great deal of attention to the speech of the member of the New Democratic Party who has mainly outlined the birth of the Family Allowances Act in 1944. I should like to seize this opportunity to suggest to him that, for almost 30 years, many changes have been brought, and if today this government saw fit to bring major changes, I think that this is justified, considering the changes, of course, that we have had over the past 30 years.

I would also add, for instance, that I have read certain comments, among others those of the hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall) who did not hesitate yesterday to say that the debate has already been extended, and that this delay affects millions of Canadians. I think he is perfectly right, if there is a genuine desire to assist, not only those who are in need, but also the whole population of Canada.

• (1730)

I was very interested to hear from the minister that 11 per cent of Canadian workers earn over \$10,000. This means that the bill before us is geared directly to the have-nots and I feel that any comparisons we can make between the principle of universality and that of selectivity lead us to believe that the bill aims at giving more to those who really need it.