

Social and Economic Security

spent travelling across the nation to involve themselves in this serious problem. It is obvious from their report they did their job well.

I wonder what the purpose of their mission was. The main recommendation arising out of the report is that the government implement a guaranteed annual income program using the negative income tax method on a national basis, and that the program be financed and administered by the government of Canada. I do not know what liaison there was between the government and the committee, but before the report was even published, the government announced a program to spend \$15 million over the next three years to carry out pilot projects in the various provinces using the guaranteed annual income. We have had first reading of Bill C-264 which will provide a family income security plan. What do we have that is new, Mr. Speaker?

The Canadian Council on Social Development agrees with this type of program for Canada. Evidently the government agrees or it would not be spending \$15 million on pilot projects, at least I hope not. Our party indicates support of such a program which is reflected in a recently released policy paper. Many other responsible organizations also agree. Everyone agrees on the implementation of such a program, but perhaps in varying degrees, such as what figure should be used as the poverty line.

Even the four mavericks who left the Senate committee in disgust for various reasons agree with the principle of a guaranteed annual income. With the greatest respect to the committee, what is so new about some of the other recommendations? I am sure everyone in this House agrees with their recommendations with regard to economic policies, consumers, education, health care, housing, law, manpower systems and day care centres. We have been tossing these around for days, months and even years, but we are not much farther ahead.

In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, the problem is very simple. The facts are very basic. There are almost 4.5 million poverty stricken Canadians. They are human beings, Mr. Speaker, men, women and children. They need help and it is our duty to recognize their needs as human beings. They elected us to govern because they had confidence and trust in us, and we must show them humane consideration. We must stop treating people as statistics on computer cards. Surely to God, most of us here have seen the suffering of the poor in every one of our constituencies. Surely, we must all be aware of children who are undernourished and who do not have enough to eat. Surely, we have all known of the sick who cannot afford to go to a doctor—even if there is a doctor or a hospital within reach in some of our more remote areas.

● (3:40 p.m.)

Certainly, some of us who are concerned have seen citizens become blind because they could not afford a pair of glasses. Certainly, we have seen people's minds and bodies deteriorate because of lack of medical attention, even to the extent of losing their initiative and will to exist. And they have lost faith in us who govern. We have all witnessed the hovels in which some people are forced to live. When are we going to realize what our priorities are in this country, Mr. Speaker? I agree that pollution is a most serious matter, the pollution of our land, sea and

[Mr. Marshall.]

air. But is it not true that the bodies of poverty-stricken people are being polluted through lack of nourishment and the atmosphere under which they have to live, which can also affect the future generations?

Certainly, it is important to foster bilingualism in Canada, but does it hold priority over the necessity to alleviate poverty? Is it necessary that the poor be able to ask for help in more than one language? It is true that we have a duty to stand in this House and condemn hostile countries for torturing human beings, but are we not just as guilty right here at home for allowing many thousands of our children to grow up undernourished? Yes, Mr. Speaker, we must have national unity, but how are we to accomplish this in our great nation when 20 per cent of our population continue to suffer in poverty and lose faith in our government? It is long past time to put politics aside and start using some statesmanship. It is time we meditated a little on our purpose here. It is time we took stock of our duty to the people we represent. It is long past time we stopped studying and started to act.

I was interested yesterday in hearing the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development (Mr. Chrétien) say, with sincere feeling I believe, that we should approach the problems of the Indians in a non-partisan manner. I endorse that idea, Mr. Speaker, and I challenge him to get his Prime Minister to agree to an all-party conference to eradicate poverty. As the minister said yesterday, he has nothing to hide and his books are wide open. So, let us get all the books open. Let us find out why the family income security program was delayed and why it cannot be put into effect right away. Let us find out from the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) just why it is we cannot afford a guaranteed income plan, why it is there is so much delay in coming to agreement with the provinces who need increased funds under the Canada Assistance Plan to pass on to the blind, the disabled and other indigents. Let us open up the books of the Minister of State for Urban Affairs (Mr. Andras) and find out why it is that we cannot provide enough homes for the poor, especially for those who live outside urban centres.

We are often criticized for wasting time in the House, Mr. Speaker, so why do we not have an open debate on poverty in the House of Commons during which we could receive straight answers and have an exchange of ideas? Or let the leaders of the various parties select some of their members to meet in an effort to solve this embarrassing and serious problems as a priority mission. If we cannot afford the cost, then let us tell the people why. I am sure the leader of our party would give the government good ideas in addition to the one on tax changes which they accepted. I am sure he would not mind advising them on such subjects as full employment, incentives to work under the GAI Plan, ideas for job opportunities and retraining programs.

One of the statements I should like to quote comes from a book by Walter Stewart which is called "Shrug". I am not usually critical, but I think since the statement comes from an outside source it is worth putting on record. He says:

When I think of these people, and all the others I have seen, whose stories I have teased out of them in my line of work, when I think of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians mired in pover-