

Canada Assistance Plan

different from the representation originally made by the Member—there could be a fairly free expression of opinion on the part of Members. It would not have the effect of law, but nevertheless it would be a clear expression of opinion and would be about the nearest thing we will ever come to in a free expression of the opinions of Members of the House.

The reason I want that procedure or something similar to it to be put into effect in the House is that at the present time we have no way, as far as papers are concerned, of obtaining, except by request, the documents we desire. This motion calls for the document which was signed between the Government of Canada and the Government of the Province of New Brunswick. Because of the moneys that were spent I believe that it should be made public.

The argument against making some of these documents public is that there would be comparisons made between Provinces which could lead to pressure on the part of the public for better services or more assistance. In other words, it would become more costly for individual Provinces. I consider this a specious argument. I believe it should be possible for individuals in various Provinces to make comparisons to see whether in their particular case their own Government was spending more or less than another Province on one particular service.

Another matter which I have tried to promote is that in the case of the Canada Assistance Plan, where the Federal Government contributes 50 per cent of the costs that are decided by the Provinces, the two distinct parts of the Plan—moneys which are paid for social assistance and moneys which are paid for social services—be separated. At the present time right across the country the proportion is approximately \$2 for social assistance for \$1 for social services. In my latest mailer to my constituents I showed, for example, that in the Province of Quebec for the last fiscal year, 1981-82, just under \$1 billion was transferred by the federal Government under the Canada Assistance Plan to the Government of that Province. Approximately two-thirds or some \$652 million was for social assistance and approximately one-third or some \$346 million was for social services.

Just to put on the record the totals for the whole of Canada last year, the amount sent to all Provinces was \$2,664 million. Again the proportion between social assistance and social services was approximately two to one—social assistance, \$1.8 billion and social services, \$864 million. The breakdown in the Province of Quebec for the last year, of course, I do not have, but the proportion has remained fairly constant from year to year. It might be just as well if I indicated that in 1977-78, for example, when the amount transferred to the Provinces was only \$1.5 billion—and I have just read that it went up last year to almost \$2.7 billion—the social services side of the payments was split, most of it going to homes for special care; the next largest sum for various welfare services; and smaller amounts for child welfare and health care.

The point I made in previous remarks in the House was that it was entirely the decision of the Province as to which social services they will support and the extent to which they will support them. Therefore I suggested that we change our

system of support. Since the Federal Government has a tremendous impact on the amount of moneys paid out by the Provinces for social assistance—and of course that impact comes in the form of all its social programs such as unemployment insurance, pension plans, child tax credits, family allowances, and so on—I believe the Federal Government should pick up a bigger proportion of the cost. Initially I propose that we increase the contribution from the federal treasury for social assistance from its present 50 per cent to two-thirds of the amount spent by the Provinces. I suggested, on the other hand, that the federal contribution to social services be reduced and, just for the sake of argument, I suggested that they be reduced from 50 per cent to one-third.

Because the social assistance payment is approximately twice the size of that for social services, the effect would be to increase the federal contribution. Why do I want to do this? There are two reasons. First, it should be abundantly apparent that social assistance payments are much greater in Provinces where there is greater need. This is why I chose this afternoon to use New Brunswick as an example. Where there is increased unemployment or where a Province, because of its lower taxes, does not have the same revenue as wealthier provinces, then obviously there is a much greater cost to the taxpayer and possibly lesser benefit for those in need.

● (1710)

If we were to increase our contribution to social assistance we would be directly assisting those Provinces with the greatest need. Specifically, that would be the Maritimes, the Atlantic Provinces, the Province of Quebec, and to some lesser extent the Province of Manitoba. I have discussed this before, but this federal Government is going to have to consider some basis of payment across the board, some standard, some minimum income plan. This will be the first step toward federal intervention in the field of social assistance. In other words, by increasing the amount from 50 per cent to say, two-thirds, it can go on increasing until it picks up the lion's share. Ultimately, I would hope this might be as much as 85 per cent or even 90 per cent. The plan would continue to be administered, as it is at the present time, by the Provinces, but obviously as the contribution from the federal treasury to social assistance increases, so too will the Provinces be in a better position to give roughly equivalent service or assistance across the country. Because the amount spent on social services is somewhat smaller, there would not be the same financing difficulty for the Provinces.

I said at the beginning of my remarks that I hoped there would be some revision of the method in which we use these Private Members' hours. In the past, as we know, Mr. Speaker, we have been allowed to speak for 20 minutes. However, if I use my allotted 20 minutes, the spokesperson for the Official Opposition uses his or her 20 minutes and the spokesperson for the New Democratic Party does likewise, then there is no time for Government response. I would like to hear from the Government today if possible before this hour expires at six o'clock whether the Government has any ideas at all regarding a change to the format of the Canada Assistance Plan. With