

Blindness Allowance

lack of co-ordination of the elements of Canada's income security system. It is well known that blind persons may receive assistance through the provinces' general assistance program or the blind persons' allowance program. Other blind persons may receive assistance under the Canada Pension Plan or the workmen's compensation legislation. What is even more difficult in the case of blind persons in need is the number of authorities with which they have to deal federally, provincially, municipally and locally.

● (1730)

I think this is an avenue of approach for federal-provincial co-operation to allow these people better access to these authorities and to give them information as to how best to put their case forward, and to put it forward to the authorities who are best able to get them the most assistance in the shortest possible time. An hon. member who has his sight realizes how confusing it is when he himself goes to various departments for assistance. That is a matter which certainly deserves a great deal of study.

The citizen is expected to co-ordinate all of these bureaucracies if he is to resolve the financial problems with which he is confronted, a degree of co-ordination which even the governments themselves—and we had better admit it—have been unable to achieve. In addition, on top of the indignity of dealing with so many agencies, there is the additional indignity of the stigma which has come to be associated with social assistance.

During the recently concluded social security review which has taken place over the last few years the needs of the blind in the context of the review have been actively considered. Last February the federal government presented income support and supplementation proposals to the provinces which would, in the long run, ensure higher benefits and improve the administration of the social security system in a number of significant ways. At the June meeting of the ministers the majority of the provinces agreed that a guaranteed income should be made available to persons whose incomes are insufficient because they are unable or not expected to work, and that there should be a system for supplementing the incomes of those who are able to work but whose incomes are not adequate for their needs. Under this proposal provincial governments would deliver the benefits to the people who qualify for them, and the federal government would share in the cost at a rate of two-thirds of the cost of the supplementation program and 50 per cent of the cost of the support program. This program, when implemented, would give substantial help in meeting the financial problems of Canadians in disadvantageous situations, including, of course, blind persons.

Once again I want to commend the hon. member for Selkirk for his presentation. It is an honourable one which I think deserves serious consideration. However, I would like to ask that when considering this we consider not only the blind but all those who have any impediment whatsoever, whether it be through blindness—

[Mr. Douglas (Bruce-Grey).]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Turner): Order, please. I regret to inform the hon. member that his allotted time has expired.

Mr. Robert C. Coates (Cumberland-Colchester North): Mr. Speaker, first I want to compliment the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Whiteway) on presenting to this House a resolution which merits the support of every hon. member. It merits the support of every hon. member because it zeroes in on a very unique and special type of disability from which, fortunately, not a great many Canadians suffer. However, their number is significant enough that as private members of this House we should give special consideration to their problem.

The hon. member for Selkirk did an excellent job of presenting a case which I believe merits the special consideration of all hon. members because of the uniqueness of the disability. It is difficult for us who sit here to appreciate fully the darkness of the world which surrounds those who are cursed with this terrible tragedy in life. Everything about our world is associated with sight, and yet these people must live in darkness and bravely go their way trying, in their unique situation, to live with their disability.

One thing which bothers me a little bit about these private members' debates is that, almost without exception, the government seems to feel it has to ask one of its representatives to stand in this House and outline the position of the government and what it is doing in whatever field the resolution happens to fall. It was nice to hear the hon. member for Bruce-Grey (Mr. Douglas) indicate that he has some appreciation for and understanding of the reasons for the hon. member for Selkirk's proposing the resolution in the first place. He then went on to itemize the various things the government is doing at this time, in effect indicating to the hon. member for Selkirk that there is really little hope or compassion in the minds of the members of the government or any intention of doing anything about what he is proposing in his resolution. I believe that if we have compassion in our souls for our fellow men and if we recognize the very special disability blind people have, we should speak from our hearts rather than use the political dogma of the party in power.

The government should say to these people who are blind that it recognizes the very special disability they face in trying to live in this world, and we, members of parliament, collectively should urge that the government try to recognize this special disability. While we cannot overcome this disability, we should at least provide an extra little bit of material assistance which might help to provide opportunities which, as a study pointed out, these people cannot find in the world today in the present circumstances and under the present welfare system which has been developed by the government. Sure, there are other kinds of disabilities, and all disabilities should be recognized to a greater extent than they are now. As far as I am concerned, the amount of disability assistance itemized by the hon. member for Bruce-Grey indicate a degree of inequality for those people who have disabilities because of the despicable needs and means tests which are imposed upon them and because of the investigators who arrive at their homes to find out whether they are getting this much, that much, or too