

*Social and Economic Security*

**Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare):** Mr. Speaker, we heard this afternoon several speakers of the opposition parties—

**Mr. Lundrigan:** How do you know that, John?

**Mr. Munro:** I was here and heard some of them. I heard all I could stand. As I say, we heard several speakers of the opposition parties talk about the question of poverty. I must say that many of the comments I have heard before. Some of them have some validity, others do not. Some of them were pretty empty of any real, suggested remedies to correct the situation. I often suspect that is the case because some of the remedies invoked are rather unpalatable, politically, for some of the parties to embrace and therefore it is safe to adopt a critical posture but say little about them.

The constant refrain some hon. members indulged in was that all our welfare, income and social policies are fragmented and overlapping and that the resources made available under these programs are inadequate for the job. We have all heard that before. Really, what is implicit in remarks of that kind is the suggestion that it would be nice if we could introduce one over-all policy—I think it has been referred to as a better policy—under which we could rationalize the many policies into one piece of legislation covering this whole area.

I think hon. members were really referring to a guaranteed annual income, although to judge from the notes I have of remarks made when I was absent no representative of any party really embraced the guaranteed annual income as the philosophy on which his party was prepared to stand or which it would advocate in the next election. I will be interested to learn this evening whether any opposition party is prepared to embrace, as part of its philosophy, the guaranteed annual income. If any party is prepared to endorse it, at what level will it endorse it? Will its members be talking about the poverty lines mentioned by the Economic Council? They are well known. Or will they talk about income that is a fraction of the poverty line income?

Also, will the members of such a party talk about costs, and where they will find the money necessary? Even if they do not want to go into the cost implications of the program, are they advocating or will they advocate a guaranteed annual income? With the possible exception of the Cr ditiste party, the parties in this House have failed to adopt the position of unequivocally embracing this concept.

**Mr. Lundrigan:** The minister is speaking and I would ask, what is his position? Never mind what the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) thinks.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger):** Order, please. Will the hon. member kindly resume his seat. The minister has the floor.

**An hon. Member:** Oh, come on!

**Mr. Lundrigan:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of something or other—

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger):** Order, please.

**Mr. Lundrigan:** On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, the minister, in common with his cabinet colleagues, has been coached about some kind of common attitude to the effect that the opposition must provide the answers. We want him to spell out the answers to this problem and to indicate if there is a change of position on his part.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger):** Order, please. Will the hon. member please resume his seat. The hon. member's question is a matter of debate. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) has the floor.

**Mr. Munro:** Mr. Speaker, perhaps during the remainder of this debate the opposition will have a chance to clarify its position. It can make clear what it means when it talks about the "fragmented" approach to welfare. Perhaps the opposition will tell us what policies they would advocate in order to correct this situation.

• (8:10 p.m.)

I hope to lay out this evening the government's position with regard to the guaranteed annual income and some of the difficulties we have encountered with regard to it. It is often said that if you have a guaranteed annual income, you can phase out many programs—in fact, discontinue them—and the funds expended on some of the programs will be offset against the cost of a guaranteed annual income. That is partially true, but only partially true.

I would be interested to hear those who advocate a guaranteed annual income tell us just what programs we should phase out or discontinue. For example, would they discontinue the unemployment insurance program or the Canada Pension Plan, both of which are social insurance schemes? Considerable moneys go into both these programs from the private sector. Individuals make contributions. It costs the individual money. Not many members in the opposition would suggest that these programs be discontinued.

Opposition members refer to "a great multiplicity of programs" and how they should all be rationalized. However, when you start to identify them one by one, not many people stand up and say they should be discontinued. Certainly, I am not advocating that we should discontinue these programs. I think they are good. I can think of people from both sides of this House who worked hard for them. They have been of real benefit.

Unemployment insurance provides income for an individual who has experienced an unfortunate occurrence in his life. He finds it necessary to turn to unemployment insurance. The principal unfortunate occurrence is unemployment and immediate cessation of income. There are sickness and maternity benefits, but let us talk about the unemployment aspect. The benefits received from unemployment insurance are preventative. If a person has little savings it prevents him from immediately falling into welfare and into the poverty cycle. It gives him an income which he earns through his contributions. It is social insurance. It is preventative. It tides him over the transitional period until, hopefully, he can find employment. There are not too many people who would say we should discontinue that program.

There are not too many people who would say we should discontinue the Canada Pension Plan. It provides