

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Speaker, although I realize time passes quickly, I seek the unanimous consent of the House to go on with my remarks.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McCleave): Order, please. It being ten o'clock, it is my duty to inform the House, pursuant to Section 11 of Standing Order 58, that proceedings on the motion have expired.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

SOCIAL SECURITY—BLIND AND DISABLED ALLOWANCES— DISCUSSIONS WITH PROVINCES TO ALLEVIATE PROBLEMS OF RECIPIENTS

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, I find that I continue to make apologies to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) or his representative who is here tonight, for having to appear at the late show on a subject which he continually refers to as a provincial responsibility. I also find that changing conditions, primarily caused by inflation, demand leadership from the minister to deal with what I can only describe as a crisis in Canada. I refer to the crisis which exists in relation to the amount of assistance available to those citizens who suffer from disablement, particularly blindness.

On February 20 I asked the minister if in view of the fact that the introduction of a guaranteed annual income had to be postponed because of differences of opinion by the provincial welfare ministers, whether any discussion had taken place as to the plight of those citizens, the blind and disabled persons of Canada.

● (2200)

The minister correctly replied that most provinces had opted over the years to take over blind and disabled allowances, which are included in the various social assistance programs under the Canada Assistance Plan. But I have to say that at present, under existing conditions, this is not good enough, because conditions today dictate that these disabled citizens cannot under any circumstance cope with the cost of the bare necessities of life required to live even below acceptable standards. And I cannot accept the answer from the federal government that the problem is provincial in nature which, to my mind, is only passing the buck—as I do when I question the provincial authorities concerned.

The Blind Persons Act and the Disabled Persons Act are reported on each year by the federal department of National Health and Welfare since back in 1952. In 1963 the legislation was amended to set a maximum allowance of \$75 per month; and later in 1966 was again amended to

permit provinces under the Canada Assistance Plan to transfer the allowances under the provincial programs.

I asked the minister and the parliamentary secretary about this. Why this was agreed to by parliament I'll never know, when I try to reconcile it with the fact that the federal government at the same time retained jurisdiction over the Old Age Security Act. By so doing, at the present time the disabled and the blind are at the mercy of 10 or 11 different programs of the provinces which, to my mind, is a ridiculous situation and leaves much to be desired.

But the tragedy of the situation is this; Madam Speaker, and that is that the disabled and blind citizens of this country are at the mercy of the procrastination of both levels of government which, for some reason or other, cannot or will not realize the special needs of those citizens of Canada who, through no fault of their own, were born with or became victims of disablement. And they will continue to suffer and will deteriorate in their bodies and minds as a result of a lack of compassion on the part of those who are responsible.

And I ask the parliamentary secretary replying tonight, when will there be some realization of the need for attendant care that is necessary for the disabled citizens of our nation? Or when will there be some realization of the special nutritional needs of the disabled and the blind, not only the adults but children suffering from the various afflictions that Canada supposedly recognizes? Again I ask, when will there be some recognition of the needs of our own Canadian adult citizens who suffer through no fault of their own?

I know and recognize that the minister responsible on a federal basis is aware of the difficulties that have come to the fore as a result of the action taken by past governments ignoring the needs of Canadians who suffer through no fault of their own and, due to the stupidity and ignorance of past governments, recognizing that disabled citizens must be given some consideration as a result of the transfer of responsibility; but until he can come up with an agreement on a guaranteed annual income he must show some compassion to provide assistance to those who have little or no influence to present a case for themselves in their predicament.

I can only say, Madam Speaker, that the situation which exists has got to be criminal; that these citizens are allowed to exist under the financial assistance presently available in this supposedly affluent nation of ours. And yet the solutions are simple, Madam Speaker, if there is any compassion in the hearts and minds of those who govern, and that is to reverse the various orders in council that proclaimed the criteria for the chronically sick under the Disabled Persons Act of 1970 and the Blind Persons Act. This can be done by repealing that procedure to give the provinces the option I have expressed, and by introducing on a national basis an amount of assistance to allow those who are disabled or blind the basic benefits which Canada proclaims is in her interest to provide for Canadians.

The disabled of our country should be granted immediately an amount of assistance even related to the poverty line figures as established by Statistics Canada, or according to their established needs as related by the Senate Committee on Poverty, which the government chooses to