

Alleged Non-Institution of Just Society

Indeed, the guaranteed income formula gives rise to many other problems which restrict its usefulness as a social measure, even if that formula is integrated in existing programs. If that scheme only applied to those outside the labour force, it could be successful to some extent.

The guaranteed income supplement granted to older citizens has worked well up to now and the same principle could be applied to other individuals unable to support themselves.

In addition, the principle would be applicable in the case of family allowances. Families with children could draw benefits for each child, based on the family income.

But much more information is needed on matters such as work incentive and administration, before a universal scheme of guaranteed income can be implemented.

To sum up, Mr. Speaker, although the guaranteed income formula is not without great weaknesses as an only policy instrument of income security, it does, however, play an important part when related to other elements of income security. It is the surest way of providing direct assistance to the poor, while sparing their dignity as citizens and their self-respect.

The guaranteed income could be used where work incentive and administration problems are not serious. It could become a permanent element of income support and supplement other security programs, as I have just said. The principle of guaranteed income is most appropriate for persons outside the labour force.

In his motion, the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) criticizes the federal government for its failure to establish a guaranteed annual income scheme for all Canadians. We all know, Mr. Speaker, that there is no comprehensive plan of income security applicable to all Canadians. However, considerable progress has been made toward the recognition of the special needs of separate groups in Canadian society and in the integration of existing programs, so as to ensure that no needy Canadian is neglected.

● (3:50 p.m.)

Incidentally, Mr. Speaker, the white paper on income security proposes a complete reform of the main programs which altogether form the Canadian income security scheme which on the whole is one of the best in the world.

If the mover of the motion had taken the time to read the white paper on income security, he would not have so readily included in his motion the matter of the guaranteed annual income scheme, as he would know that the elements of such a plan have already been proposed to the Canadian people.

No concern is more active with us than that of alleviating the burden of the Canadian poor. However, nowadays the idea of destitution is only relative: it no longer means abject poverty. It must be considered as an insufficient income, a lack of opportunities and the loss

[Mr. Isabelle.]

of respect for the individual, which are three prejudices which should be unknown to the individual in our society. Nevertheless, Mr. Speaker, whatever may be the definition, poverty implies more than insufficient income; it means also a lack of possibilities, maybe poor health, no training opportunity for better employment or for interesting leisure

Poverty means a depressing environment, maybe a feeling of failure, of frustration, of alienation. It is to be noted that schemes for guaranteed income or guaranteed annual income do not bear mostly on the aspects of this problem, but on the absence of the income factor. The formula for guaranteed income deals in fact with certain economic aspects relating to income. The guaranteed income method does not alleviate however the inconveniences of these aspects of employment which rank first people in the low income category.

It is also unfortunate, Mr. Speaker, that a guaranteed annual income does not permit to remove social barriers forbidding access to certain employment. It will not improve the low productivity of incompetent workers, it will not lighten family obligations which prevent some people from entering the labour market.

No guaranteed income scheme will suppress the prejudice caused to people who, because of their ethnic origin or their mother-tongue, are maintained in a state of poverty. The guaranteed income scheme will not suppress the inability of parents to give their children the psychological help or the education which would allow them to avoid poverty.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the main factors contributing to poverty are physiological or psychological. It is a physical disability, including old age, unfortunately, which prevents many people from working. Or else it is some incapacity due to mental retardation, an injury, or some illness which prevent others from earning their living. And, of course, some people are poor because they lack motivation.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, a guaranteed annual income is not a cure-all for the economic, social and cultural problems of today's society.

It is not a phenomenon peculiar to Canada, Mr. Speaker. One has only to read the daily newspapers to see there exists over the whole world a kind of effervescence.

It is admitted that a guaranteed annual income will provide the necessary things of life, but no scheme of this kind can alone measure up to the tremendous problems of poverty which affect almost a fifth of our population.

Mr. Speaker, the opposition members blame the federal government for not instituting a guaranteed annual income plan. I would say to them that words come quickly to the lips and that often only five minutes are needed to present a destructive critical motion, but when one considers the facts as they are and wants to translate words into deeds and actions, it is an entirely different matter.