

number of Canadians. I have been quoted as saying that the welfare system is a mess. That was some months ago, and now on reconsideration I think it is an impossible mess! It is too late for reform—it is beyond reform. It is too late to apply poultices or bandages or even to attempt to modify it. It is useless to try to make changes in the system because of citizen hostility and recipient anger. Its situation is now such that efforts to change it, even if such efforts should result in its betterment, are no longer possible and just would not be believed. It has infected generations of Canadians and plagued our society. I think we have to face up to that situation.

We have been considering this situation in committee, and so far as I am concerned I think the only solution is to scrap it. We must start all over again. We must begin anew. Then the question arises, do we have an alternative in the interim? I think we have.

Hon. Mr. Choquette: What is your alternative?

Hon. Mr. Croll: I will get to it. I would not leave you without one.

Hon. Mr. Choquette: I should think not.

Hon. Mr. Croll: I have just expressed my views about the system, but what do others say about it? What do people who are more knowledgeable about the system than I am think of it, and what do they say about it?

Some time ago the Department of National Health and Welfare appointed a National Council on Welfare. It is a newly constituted body of 21 private citizens to advise the Minister of National Health and Welfare on matters relating to welfare. In that group there are six categories with representation as follows: the low income groups, six; disadvantaged minorities comprising the black community, one; the Acadian community, one; the Métis community, one; the Indian community, one; social work educators, three; social service delivery system, one. Then there is the chairman, and five members interested in social service volunteer activity. These are the guests who came to dinner and this is what they had to say in a statement issued on October 7.

The National Council of Welfare feels strongly that the provision of income support by way of needs tested public assistance programs is inherently degrading, stigmatizing and destructive of self-respect, having a debilitating effect upon the recipient and upon the children of the recipient families.

Those are their words.

We look forward to the Federal Government's White Paper on Income Security, to the Report of the Special Senate Committee on Poverty and to what we hope will be a far-reaching national discussion which will encompass not only alternative mechanisms of income distribution, but the social values inherent in each of them.

Then they go on to say:

At present, however, persons in need are dependent upon programs of public assistance administered

[Hon. Mr. Croll.]

by provinces and municipalities and supported by the federal Government through the Canada Assistance Plan. Recognizing both the inherent inadequacies of this approach to income support and its being all that presently exists to meet the urgent needs of all those Canadians who suffer poverty in an affluent country, the National Council of Welfare has resolved as follows:

Then they discuss the costs and continue:

AND WHEREAS these conditions include that the province provide assistance to any person in need "in an amount or manner that takes into account his basic requirements",

AND WHEREAS "basic requirements" are defined by the act as "food, shelter, clothing, fuel, utilities, household supplies and personal requirements",

AND WHEREAS various provinces and municipalities would appear to have adopted policies and practices in clear violation of this condition, such as the exclusion from receipt of assistance of certain categories of persons in need, limits on the duration of receipt of assistance by certain categories of persons in need, and provision of assistance to certain categories of persons in need in amounts or manners which take into account less than all the basic requirements set out in the act,

We have been saying that across the country, in a gentle sort of manner, pointing it out as we visited each province, that a gap exists between the laws that guarantee the meeting of needs and their actual application. Failure to implement the legislation has weakened the very fabric of the system. Laws that are enacted and not enforced can only result in three things: militancy, protest and action.

Then they go on to say:

The existence of laws on the statute books does not ensure their compliance. Rights are established by law but defined and enforced by courts. Until recently, however, there has been virtually no use of the courts in Canada to ensure that the application of our welfare laws protects the rights established in them.

That is a statement made by a committee appointed by the Government, and I gave you their qualifications.

Federal Government money is spent on what we call basic needs, and they have been defined. These needs should be able to be met on the same terms and conditions in all parts of Canada. That raises the question of a uniform standard of basic needs across the country, as uniform as income tax. That in itself will involve the realistic distribution of Canada's wealth, which has not been the case for almost 20 years in so far as the poor are concerned.

We have always talked about the gap between the rich and the poor. What we are having to talk about in this country is the gap between the poor and the middle class. That is getting wider; that is something new and something that most of you can appreciate.