

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

recovery provision came into play. My concern is that while the problem has been resolved for at least this year, will the government be prepared to continue to protect people in receipt of pension allowances in the event that the level of income is affected by programs falling entirely within federal jurisdiction? I refer to programs such as those which in fact operate on the basis of direct injection into the economy of taxpayers' dollars—programs such as LIP.

• (2210)

I am sure the hon. gentleman opposite understands my concern. I wonder, at the same time, whether the government might consider in a realistic way and in consultation with the provinces a total and effective review of the blind persons allowance inasmuch as we are all aware that under the Canada Assistance Plan people who have this type of disability are, or could be under other circumstances, entitled to income up to \$1,900 before impairment of that program begins to take place, whereas under the existing program they are limited to \$600 over and above the amount they receive.

I hope the hon. gentleman will comment on this matter of interest and concern people who are in receipt of the blind persons allowance. I am sure they and the provinces would welcome a clear demonstration of understanding of the difficulties which arise under programs such as LIP. In short, I believe they would welcome clarification on where they will stand next year. I think this is a most important matter and I would appreciate my colleague's comments.

Mr. Lloyd Francis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs): Mr. Speaker, by arrangement with the hon. member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet) I have undertaken to make a reply this evening. The hon. member has made his brief and material available to me.

The Blind Persons Act provides for federal sharing, under agreement, of 75 per cent of the amounts paid by the provinces for allowances to blind persons 18 years of

age and over. The provinces pay allowances to recipients under authority of provincial legislation but in accordance with the provisions of the federal act. The act specifies that payments to a province shall be made only in respect of a recipient whose annual income, inclusive of allowance, does not exceed \$1,500 for a single person—the hon. member pointed this out—or \$2,580 for a married couple. If both spouses are blind, the income must not exceed \$2,700.

Income for this purpose includes all earnings, gratuities and contributions received whether in cash or in kind. This is the requirement under the act. However, under the Blind Persons Act it is general practice for provinces to disregard earned income during the period that the allowance is suspended, except in the case of regular seasonal employment, provided the person advises the province at the time he commences employment and requests suspension of his allowance.

Similarly, when earnings cease, the person may have his allowance reinstated without taking into consideration the amount earned during the period the allowance is suspended. Although federal officials have encouraged this practice, it is at the discretion of the province whether or not the practice is adopted. Under these circumstances, blind persons who have been employed on projects such as those under LIP could have earnings without creating an overpayment or affecting future payment of allowances.

Mr. Forrestall: For this year only.

Mr. Francis: No. This is a general policy which can be applied by the province under the existing regulations. It could apply to this year or any period in the future. The officials of the Department of National Health and Welfare have been in touch with officials of the department of public welfare in Nova Scotia and their understanding is that the problem regarding blind persons employed on LIP projects will be favourably settled.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10.16 p.m.