

Guaranteed Income

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege concerning the statement made a few moments ago in this House by the hon. member for Laval (Mr. Roy) that the opposition had objected to Bill C-176, the agricultural products marketing legislation. I would point out, Mr. Speaker, that when this bill was introduced in this House the Social Credit Party did not object to it. We asked for some amendments so as to include only beef.

● (1510)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY S.O. 58—SUGGESTED ESTABLISHMENT OF A MINIMUM ANNUAL GUARANTEED INCOME PROGRAM

Mr. René Matte (Champlain) moved:

That this House regrets that the government has taken no concrete steps to ensure the establishment of a guaranteed minimum annual income to overcome poverty in Canada and enable each Canadian citizen to cope with problems of rising prices and to fight inflation efficiently.

He said: Mr. Speaker, the gist of our motion is of such importance that I feel the government should consider it very attentively, so as to fill in the gaps which exist at the present time.

Mr. Speaker, hon. members of this party have been ridiculed over the years for advocating the establishment of a guaranteed minimum annual income system which, our adversaries claimed, would be equivalent to "throwing good money away" and inciting people to idleness. Over the past few years, however, all political parties have more or less looked into this idea of a vital minimum income. It is therefore important to conceive such a program and to examine the true fundamental principles which may bring us the best in this area.

The motion which I had the honour to move, Mr. Speaker, aims at blaming the government in a concrete way, for we all remember that it had been proposed in the Speech from the Throne for 1972—it was then a glimmer of hope for us—to have at least an embryonic program of a guaranteed minimum annual income.

Unfortunately, it seems that the government is not yet ready to go ahead with such a program, which explains our motion. Mr. Speaker, we are in favour of a program which, contrary to those administered by the provinces, would replace a ramshackle, unfair, frustrating and expensive system. We are proposing an adequate and fair system which would respect individual freedom.

Mr. Speaker, the welfare programs now in operation in all the provinces, the old age security pensions, the unemployment insurance program, all those programs concerned more or less with welfare are inadequate because they are no longer realistic, and we have to keep improving them all the time. They are unfair because some people need a much higher income than what they are receiving in welfare, for instance, but they are not getting it. Others

[Mr. Speaker.]

who do not need allowances are getting them. Under the old age security system, there is a glaring discrimination against couples when one of the spouses is younger or older. It is a case of flagrant injustice when one of the spouses is 65 and the other 60 or 55. They are told to be content with one income, namely \$180 a month, including the supplement.

If both spouses are 65, they get an amount of \$350, as if, Mr. Speaker, the cost of living for two people aged between 60 and 65 was lower than for two people who are 65. This is unfair. Under our present welfare programs, there is a great deal of injustice. It is a defective program.

Therefore, we are proposing a real program that would prompt people to be even more energetic, more active, that would urge them to work instead of rushing for unemployment insurance as they are doing at present. And this is understandable. Faced with such dilemmas and when the alternative is to work at 30 below in the middle of winter for \$90 a week, I understand that someone will hesitate and move heaven and earth to get unemployment insurance instead.

When families earn a very low income in wages while welfare recipients get as much, it is understandable that the head of family who works and earns very low wages longs to live on welfare.

Mr. Speaker, it is our present system that makes people take such an attitude. In my opinion, this is a very serious matter and I intend to prove that our party has been advocating this program for a very long time and wishes to bring it back to its true proportions.

Nowadays, there is much talk about guaranteed annual income. Many economists have endorsed the principle of guaranteed income. All federal political parties have considered at their conventions the implementation of such a policy. Many countries, and even a Canadian province, are now trying out these programs.

The Senate Special Committee on Poverty, chaired by Senator Croll, recommended this policy as the most efficient way of dealing with the problem of poverty in Canada during the seventies. Many people, including the most influential members of the present government, have not agreed yet to implement this guaranteed annual income program.

But, Mr. Speaker, nobody now is making fun of the idea of establishing such a program, that could be set up today and this I believe is a great step we have taken.

According to many books published recently on the various guaranteed income plans, it is said that such a concept has become popular only since 1966. However, we must point out that the Social Crediters called for such an income distribution program many decades ago.

The Social Credit proposals as to the best guaranteed annual income program are still much more advanced than most systems, the objective of which is to provide for a sufficient and vital income for all, so as to guarantee them a decent living.

Quoting the words of Social Credit founder Major C. H. Douglas is enough to show the truth of that assertion. Douglas called for the payment of a national dividend to all citizens to meet their essential physical needs. The