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CANADA'S EXPERIMENTS IN SOCIAL LEGISLATION

Excerpts from an address by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, Mr. Paul Martin, delivered at the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York, on February 28, 1952.

...My talk today is about Canada's approach to the problem of social need. At the outset, I want to emphasize this basic principle: The course of all security lies in production. Much has been done in Canada to counter insecurity and to provide equality of opportunity. But there is no magic formula for social security. It can be provided only through work.

The money to be spent on social security this year by all governments in Canada, and by the voluntary agencies, will total \$1 1/3 billions. By itself this seems an impressive figure, but the reasonable level of social expenditures in Canada is indicated by the fact that they have never exceeded 5 per cent of our gross national product.

While Canada's great period of social progress has been over the past dozen years, it has been a story of steady, unspectacular development of measures responsibly conceived and unhurriedly brought into effect. From 1939 to 1951 the percentage of Canada's gross national product devoted to voluntary and governmental health and welfare expenditures increased by less than one-half of one per cent -- from 4.3 per cent to 4.7 per cent.

Need For Social Assistance

Long ago, in the simpler forms of society, when the family or clan or small rural community was more or less sufficient to itself, the individual who fell sick, who was unable to work, or who suffered any one of the many everyday hazards of life, could receive assistance on an informal basis from the group of which he was a member.

Even within our memory, the rural family had its own security. There was a place by the fire and at the table for the dependent relative. The security of each family was reinforced by the friendly and charitable sharing of risks throughout the small rural parish or community.

It is clear, then, that in our highly industrialized society there is need for substantial, organized welfare measures -- in addition to all that can be done through voluntary individual or group effort. Since we accept the tremendous advantages of the free enterprise system, we must also accept the responsibility of seeing that no one suffers because of this system's shortcomings.