

Social Security

accused of prolonging the debate, I shall close in the hope that it may come to a vote immediately.

Mr. Bona Arsenault (Bonaventure): Mr. Speaker, I wish to be brief in what I have to say. At the very beginning of my remarks may I state that the object under consideration at this time is one which, according to the provisions of the British North America Act, falls within the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces. Therefore it seems to me that unless and until our Canadian constitution is amended no plans can be worked out or carried into effect by the government, or by any other federal administration, to provide pensions to the disabled, without first seeking the approval and the co-operation of the provinces to that effect.

An hon. Member: Family allowances.

Mr. Arsenault: It does not apply to family allowances at all; they are paid to all children within a certain age. In this instance we will have to have provision such as is made for the blind. According to section 92(7) and 92(13) of the Canadian constitution this is a matter which falls within provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. Low: But it is not insurmountable, as it was in the case of the blind.

Mr. Arsenault: A plan should be worked out.

Mr. Coldwell: The same as in connection with old age pensions.

Mr. Arsenault: Yes, otherwise it would infringe upon provincial autonomy.

It is urgent, most urgent, that adequate assistance be provided to Canadians, to men and women who, on account of permanent disability caused through sickness, accident or otherwise, are in need of relief. Assistance must be given to these men and women whose cases are not already covered by provincial legislation.

How often do members of the House of Commons stand helplessly, confronted with heart-breaking cases of disabled persons in distress. How often do all of us, on both sides of the house, and without exception, receive letters and requests for help of some sort from unfortunate persons belonging to the category set out in the resolution, what I would describe as the out-class of our population, those who are disabled and in need. They are too old to receive the benefits of family allowances and too young to receive old age pensions. Yet they are unable to earn their own livelihood. Their cases are not covered by any legislation, and our society seems to deal with them most unfairly.

[Mr. Rooney.]

Whatever the cost—and I repeat this—whatever the cost to the provinces or to the federal treasury, something must be done, and done without delay, for this forgotten class in our population. No civilized government in the world, no Christian democracy, can let any section of its citizens suffer. I contend some means must be found, some provision must be made at the earliest possible date for the care of the disabled in our country, those who are unable to support themselves, and who do not already receive assistance from provincial administrations.

Naturally this will add to the cost of providing social security for Canadian citizens. But the more highly civilized a country, the greater the expense of carrying on its government. I believe that by an expenditure of not more than five per cent of the amount already provided for social security the disabled and others in need of financial assistance could be adequately cared for.

Yes, I know some will claim that it is not the function of either the provincial governments or the federal government to undertake what can be accomplished by private charity. They are afraid of the so-called welfare state. Let me tell them that we have no choice: we will either have a welfare state in some measure or, sooner or later, we may be a communist state. Faith, hope and charity provide the only fertile soil for freedom, the only air in which a true democracy can breathe.

In conclusion, my proposal is that this government now—not later—should seek the co-operation of the provinces in order to find a means to provide a pension of at least \$40 a month for the disabled in the country who are unable to support themselves, and whose cases are not already covered by provincial legislation. Pensions for the disabled would be provided with the co-operation of the provincial administrations, on the same basis as the provision already made for the blind.

(Translation):

Mr. L. D. Tremblay (Dorchester): Mr. Speaker, I have only a few words to say on this resolution which, obviously, has the whole-hearted support of all members.

I join with previous speakers in warmly congratulating our excellent colleague from Terrebonne (Mr. Bertrand) for the initiative he takes every year in putting this resolution on the order paper.

A few moments ago, he recalled with the perseverance and persistency typical, I assume, of the people from up north, that this was the sixth time he was moving a similar resolution in the house.