

Social and Economic Security

[Translation]

Mr. Léonel Beaudoin (Richmond): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to support the motion put by my leader, the hon. member for Témiscamingue (Mr. Caouette).

The notice of motion reads as follows:

That this House condemns the government for its failure to propose legislation establishing a social and economic security plan placing all Canadians above the poverty line.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely believe the non-confidence motion comes at the right time. For the last few months, the government, the opposition parties and inquiry commissions of all kinds, even Senate committees, have been considering the problem, or rather the solution, of an economic and social security plan for all Canadians.

Today, I would like to draw the attention of the House on a much debated aspect of establishing such a program, that is the determination of standards to define the poverty level.

The Economic Council of Canada states that more than 700,000 Canadians, among the aged, live below the poverty level. And how does the Economic Council of Canada define poverty?

At pages 104 and 105 of the Fifth Annual Review of the Economic Council of Canada, published in September, 1968, it is stated, and I quote:

To feel poverty is, among other things, to feel oneself an unwilling outsider—a virtual nonparticipant in the society in which one lives. The problem of poverty in developed industrial societies is increasingly viewed not as a sheer lack of essentials to sustain life, but as an insufficient access to certain goods, services, and conditions of life which are available to everyone else and have come to be accepted as basic to a decent, minimum standard of living.

Mr. Speaker, the Economic Council of Canada believes that poverty is not determined by the size of one's income, but rather by a state of mind. I could say that being poor is feeling that one's rights are not recognized and that one does not have the minimum required to survive.

The Western Quebec Social Service in a special bulletin dated December 1966 reported as follows:

Poverty appears to us mainly as material destitution, lack of wages, low incomes, etc. We seldom pause to consider the moral aspect of poverty and it is perhaps there that poverty shows itself more extensively and painfully.

A socio-economic study alone could determine the extent of poverty, but it is not difficult to see poverty and find in each city and village families with an inadequate income suffering from illness or unemployment, families deeply in debt, families with poor accommodations, families that are ill-fed and undernourished. There is also a social and moral aspect of poverty which is not less frequently found: broken families, irresponsible parents, neglected and abandoned children, delinquents, penniless old people.

Mr. Speaker, the Social Service which has made several investigations in Montreal and elsewhere recognizes that it is difficult to determine who is poor or destitute.

• (4:30 p.m.)

Poverty exists in Canada, that is certain, but we must first find out, through all these investigations, who are the poor. Thus, in the report of the Special Senate Committee on Poverty, at page 175, one can read the following:

A PROPOSAL FOR A GUARANTEED ANNUAL INCOME

The United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, to which Canada is a signatory nation, states, in Article 25:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.

The Senate Committee is firmly convinced that the time has now come for Canada to incorporate the right to an adequate standard of living for all Canadians into the *Canadian Bill of Rights*. It is also clear that an adequate standard of living in the Canadian context is dependent on the security provided by an adequate income. The acceptance by Canada of an adequate minimum income as a matter of right for all citizens is the principal recommendation of this report.

The provision of a Guaranteed Annual Income to all Canadians is more than an anti-poverty measure: it is an idea whose time has come. If properly designed, implemented, and operated, such a plan will restore to decency and dignity those Canadians who, through no fault of their own, have been stigmatized and demeaned because they are unable to earn an income adequate for themselves and their families. It will also protect all Canadians from loss of income through accident, illness, technological progress, and the many events that can deprive any of us of our income and make us poor.

Here I draw the attention of the House to the fact that this report refers to technological progress in Canada. In the last few years, technical progress has created and improved the machine, replaced many human workers and created for ever I think, in Canada an almost permanent poverty, that is unemployment. To palliate this unemployment which will exist, a guaranteed income will have to be established.

Mr. Speaker, the Senate committee has highlighted the problem we are concerned with. Poverty must be considered very seriously and it is up to the government to take remedial measures, not for political reasons but with a real concern to help all Canadians.

Every day, Mr. Speaker, I receive scores of letters from my constituents who are in untenable situations. Poverty does exist and it is very easy for us as members of the House of Commons to come into contact with these sad cases.

As far as I am concerned, I must say that every Saturday when I receive my constituents at home, I have to witness some very sad scenes. Sometimes they are aged people or wage earners who for some reason are unable to provide for their families and come to me for help.

The present system is such that the people who are asking for what is due to them must humble themselves and, psychologically, that is deplorable. It is high time for the government to consider this problem and to carry on what we are proposing today, that is a system of economic and social security placing all Canadians above the poverty level.

Mr. Speaker, *Le Petit Journal* of July 8, 1971 featured the following article, and I quote:

One third of the people of Montreal are poverty stricken.

To day, in 1971, a Montreal family whose total annual income is below \$6,000 is considered as a "low income family," poor that is.

To establish the poverty level at \$6,000 a year, sociologists started from the fact that families with an annual income of \$6,000 or less have to spend 76.5 per cent of their income on their basic needs—food, clothing, and housing. This figure is higher than the