

Canada Assistance Plan

Before dealing with specific features of the bill, it may be helpful to put the total program into perspective and to relate it to the people who will benefit from it. Almost one million persons receive direct aid through the various programs which come within the scope of the Canada Assistance Plan. These include some 85,000 persons still covered under the old age assistance program, 8,000 receiving blindness allowances and 55,000 receiving disabled persons allowances. Also included are 200,000 needy mothers with dependent children, 600,000 other recipients of assistance, the cost of whose assistance now is shared under the Unemployment Assistance Act, and 50,000 children in the care of child welfare authorities.

In introducing the resolution to the bill, I stated that the new cost anticipated under the plan would be some \$85 million in the current fiscal year. These funds would be both for improving programs supported through existing federal-provincial legislation and for extending federal support in areas where it is not now provided. These new expenditures will bring the total federal outlays on public assistance and welfare services to more than \$250 million.

Expenditures, of course, could exceed estimates, depending on the rate at which the provinces are able to implement improvements and extensions in their programs. If we add the provincial expenditures to the federal figures, the total commitment for public assistance and welfare services in Canada in 1966-67 will amount to well over \$500 million. I give these figures to point up the scope of the program under consideration and to indicate that, in terms of the dollar amounts involved and the number of people directly affected, this is a program of substantial size and importance.

In moving second reading, I should like again to refer to the extent of federal and provincial agreement attained on the content of the plan as set out in the bill. The Canada Assistance Plan was discussed at two federal-provincial conferences of welfare ministers convened by my predecessor in April 1964 and May 1965 and at a third meeting which I chaired in January 1966. Through these meetings we were able to discuss proposals concerning assistance and welfare services in the light of provincial experience and to work out a mutually acceptable approach for this new program. At this time I should like to acknowledge the contributions made by the

various provincial ministers in the development of the plan.

The legislation that you have before you is divided into five parts. I think it would be of interest to members if I were to deal with the major parts of the bill in a general way. Part I deals generally with assistance and welfare services, part II is concerned with Indian welfare, part III with work activity projects, and parts IV and V make amendments to certain associated pieces of legislation.

In considering part I, I should like to centre my remarks around two of its distinct features; its coverage of assistance for persons in need and its provisions for encouraging the improvement and extension of welfare services. In referring to assistance, I should like to draw attention to the definitions of "assistance" and "persons in need" as contained in clause 2 and to the proposed terms of agreement as set out in clause 6.

The definition of assistance in the legislation sets out the scope of benefits for persons in need that may be supported through the plan. The core of this definition is contained in the reference to basic requirements; that is, the times that are essential to maintain even a minimum standard of living. These are food, shelter, clothing, fuel, utilities, household supplies and personal requirements. Assistance programs whose benefits fail to cover these items cannot be thought of as adequate and it is proposed, in signing agreements under the plan, that provinces will agree to provide assistance in amounts which take into account individual and family requirements for each of these items.

Some concern has been expressed by hon. members about the position that the plan will take on standards in assistance programs. No doubt they have in mind the contribution of the old age assistance, blind and disabled persons allowances programs in securing a universal benefit standard in all parts of Canada. However, I think we must recognize, when benefits are being related to requirements, that variations in costs of living and in regional and individual circumstances rule out a definition in terms of a fixed number of dollars.

We are hopeful that the emphasis on adequacy in the plan, both in terms of assistance and welfare services, and the additional financial support available to the provinces