

Social Security

people or which will degrade them into mechanistic non-utilitarian routines described as welfare employment.

It is the right of every Canadian to have meaningful employment and it is the responsibility of government to ensure that all Canadians have permanent jobs—jobs which hold something for their future and for the future of the country. This is the kind of new deal we want; this will bring greater prosperity and opportunity than any tinkering with the welfare programs.

I agree with the proposals in reference to the Canada Pension Plan. We do need higher ceilings. I am sure that, like me, every member of this House is receiving letters from people whose payments are being diminished because of income from some other area or some other pension. That was not the intention of the Canada Pension Plan.

On an occasion like this it is always difficult to avoid that rather crude expression, "I told you so". I do not want to do that, but I am delighted that we now find enshrined in these proposals something we have always believed in, that the actual and real cost of living should be built into all these pension plans. It was a disgrace, before the shock of last October, that we had, in the face of inflation, an artificially lower increase built into our pension plans so that we were really taking it out of the old people.

For far too long in this country welfare has been a political football. I think this is one area that should transcend politics. I have no intention of seeking to win office by bribes, promises or threats to the old people of this land. I will not enter the auction room. I will not knock legislation for the sake of knocking, nor will I hesitate to commend any good move made by this minister or anyone else.

It is extremely difficult in such an expanded statement as the minister's to find precise commitments. I would have liked to know more clearly what the minister is going to do for the blind and the handicapped. I would have liked the minister to indicate that he intends to follow the example of the British parliament which has produced some splendid legislation for people who are permanently handicapped and have difficulty coping with life's basic needs.

I agree with the minister's reference to flexibility. I listened to him very carefully when he said:

We suggest that provinces should have the power to vary the levels of allowances and income supplements paid under federal programs. Within prescribed limits, the provinces would be able to reduce the allowances paid under one federal program and transfer the savings to increase the allowances paid under another program.

Oh, flexibility! Oh, conversion! I am all for it. Had this attitude prevailed months ago we would have had a more harmonious dominion-provincial relationship in this country. I commend the minister for the following paragraph in which he says that there should be a framework of national norms and national minimum standards to ensure a basic equity to all Canadians affected. We must never lose sight of the goal and aspirations so clearly set forth by the Rowell-Sirois report many years ago that Canadians in rich provinces, small provinces, Canadians in the north, in the south, all Canadians, should expect a decent standard of social services and that they need not live in a wealthy,

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

large province to get that basic standard. I would advise the minister not to lose sight of that paragraph. We must have national norms.

● (1430)

I should also like to say that we do not want the development of a welfare jungle in Canada. I should like to think that Canadians can expect a good standard, an ever-improving standard. I hope that the paper we have received today will bring forth real legislation and concrete advantages for the Canadian people, and that it will not join on the book shelves all the reports of commissions that are gathering dust in all our offices. We must wait, it seems, for further discussions, further exchanges and further points of view. I say to the minister, we cannot wait too long. Too many Canadians are having it too hard to allow for such administrative and legislative leisure. I say that in so far as these measures are helpful we will help their thrust and get them into legislation. That is a commitment from this party. But in the long run, and before too long, the country must gather together all the strands of its welfare programs. We must get something that is more unified, more efficient, more coherent and more compassionate. Even if all the aims that we can see in this paper are realized, that goal will not be achieved.

So we may have to wait for a new day, for new men with new ideas. In the meantime, however, we will make the best of what the minister has brought forward. For that I congratulate him. I want to say he almost tempted me, when he spoke about family allowances, to move away from my plan of three children and try to emulate the Minister of Justice, but I think that I will need to enter into further consultations at home before I can commit myself.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): October 30, 1972! What a difference that day made.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, this is an important statement which has been given to the House by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) and we welcome it. I have already had occasion to admit that the minister is one of the few in the cabinet who has given the impression that he means business. I trust that he will not disappoint us but that he will do everything he can to see that the program forecast in this statement is implemented just as early as possible.

I am happy to underline the words the minister used when he said that our social security system in this country, for all its weaknesses, provided a solid foundation on which to build. In saying that I have in mind, in particular, the extent to which we have established universal programs. I believe that on that foundation we can build a really satisfactory and adequate system of social security.

I want also to agree with the thrust of the minister's statement, in his making it clear that a social security program has to be a co-operative effort, particularly between the federal government and the governments of the provinces.

In all the things that have been presented to us today there are just two that the minister has labelled as "to be