

Vocational Rehabilitation

I should like to make some observations which I feel may be helpful to the minister in this regard. First of all I should like to express my complete support of this measure. I feel that this program will do a great deal of good for those individuals who require vocational training. I would suggest that nothing gives a greater lift to young men and women who have come to the point where they do not know what to do than an association with a school or group who are interested in their problems. I feel this program should not stop at that point but that there should be a follow-up in assisting these people to find employment after they have received training.

I want to make some observations with regard to a matter which came to my attention last year and the year previous in connection with individuals who are handicapped. I recall that on the Welland ship canal, which runs through my riding, a great number of disabled veterans were employed as flagmen. This was a type of job that a slightly handicapped individual could handle. I believe there were 50 or 60 individuals employed as flagmen on this canal from Port Weller to Port Colborne. Last year the seaway authority saw fit, and I cannot quarrel with it in the light of automation, to install automatic lights on the bridges. The result was that some of these 60 men were out of work. I think some of them were absorbed in other activities.

The year previous the Ontario hydro—we have probably no control here—carried out a similar pattern in the Niagara peninsula with the result that some 50 or 60 men employed as gatemen were automatically let out when the control lights were installed there.

I feel at this time, with the serious unemployment situation throughout the land, departments concerned should give serious consideration to deferring automation so as to retain this type of employment for those individuals who are handicapped. I am aware of the fact that the postal department at the present time, and for several years, has been experimenting with automatic electronic letter sorting machines. While I fully approve of automation in industry in order that we can keep up with competition from abroad, I think that government departments should give consideration to helping these handicapped individuals for the time being by deferring the installation of this type of automatic equipment in respect of functions that can be carried out by those who are slightly handicapped.

I know there are 100 individuals in my riding who have been laid off as a result of this automation and across the country there probably is a sizeable number of individuals

[Mr. Smith (Lincoln).]

in a similar position. I have mentioned these things to the minister with the hope that he will give some consideration to them.

Mr. Martin (Essex East): Mr. Chairman, I should like to say a few words in regard to this matter because I have had some interest in this problem both as a minister of the crown and as a member of the House of Commons over a number of years. However, before doing that, I should like to acknowledge with appreciation the words of the hon. member for Kootenay West and, if I may without appearing to be too late, those of the Prime Minister today, when both the right hon. gentleman and the hon. gentleman kindly welcomed me back to the house after my indisposition.

No one of course, disagrees with the principle of the resolution before the committee. We are all in agreement that it is desirable to encourage vocational rehabilitation and that it is desirable to encourage the fullest possible rehabilitation through medical skills of those individuals in our country who are disabled, either permanently or partially. We are all in agreement that everything possible should be done by those levels of government in the country responsible for the formulation and the administration of programs of social welfare. We are all in agreement that voluntary organizations in this, the middle part of the twentieth century, should be engaged in doing whatever they can to improve the lot of those of our fellow citizens who suffer from one disability or another.

Having said that, I think we really should examine what we are called upon to do in this House of Commons at the present time. If one were to examine the resolution in terms of the words as they present themselves for our scrutiny, one would come to the conclusion that we were now embarking upon a pioneering effort in this parliament and that we were now establishing a new program in the field of social welfare and social action. That is not the case. This particular resolution presents us with nothing new whatsoever. It will not in any way add one iota to the responsibilities of government in Canada as now exercised by authority of parliament. I think that is something we must clearly understand when we come to accede to the proposals made in this resolution by the Minister of Labour.

The resolution first of all asks that we authorize the Minister of Labour to enter into agreements with the provinces to provide for sharing of the costs incurred by the latter in carrying out programs of vocational rehabilitation for disabled persons. It also asks us to authorize the Minister of Labour to undertake the co-ordination of federal activities