

*Guaranteed Minimum Income*

Bachelors and married people with no children are not as a rule eligible to the various programs designed to meet the needs of particular classes of people. Still, it was expected that the unemployment insurance program would apply to all persons actually in need. But we note that, at the provincial level, welfare programs have not generally taken into account the needs of the low wage earners, that is what I call the category of poor workers.

Everyone knows that, generally speaking, poor workers are not entitled to social welfare benefits under present regulations. This situation prevails despite the fact that, under the provisions of the Canada Assistance Plan or of the agreements concluded with the provinces pursuant to that Plan, there is absolutely no restrictions concerning the federal share of the costs of assistance to full-time workers.

Some provinces are determinedly against financial assistance as the basis of the general policy for full-time employees; other provinces do not reject it. However, the principle of granting financial assistance is extremely limited in those provinces and benefits are usually available only to the families which experience severe hardships.

The proposal of giving welfare allowances to full-time workers naturally raises the much debated question of determining reasons, more particularly so when it is considered with regard to the application of adequate forms of assistance to people who are unable to work. The objection is often raised that the fact of providing those who are unable to work with a satisfactory allowance can dampen the sense of independence of the recipients who are partly able to work and of those full-time workers who could not earn more than what the assistance brings. That is the basic dilemma.

If the welfare systems provide adequate assistance for the unemployables and give identical help to employable recipients, but without any income exemption, the latter will not be encouraged to work: any income arising out of a job only reduces the amount of benefits and leaves no advantage to someone who works.

If employable individuals are granted partial income exemptions beyond a basic adequate level, not only a huge expenditure of public funds will be necessary to help those whose income is lower than that level, but the systems will then apparently be subsidizing the small wage-earners. If to give an

incentive to work to employable individuals, a certain form of guaranteed income lower than an adequate minimum level is applied, the difficulty remains as far as the determination of an adequate income for the unemployables is concerned.

For two years now the federal government has been carrying out a reappraisal of its social security programs and of their objectives in order to decide which method among those that I have just mentioned, or which combination of methods, would be more in harmony with the aims of social security in the future. A close analysis of the costs and consequences of each method is necessary.

In the throne speech last fall, as hon. members will recall, the government announced the preparation of a white paper on social security to be tabled in the House during the current session. That document will make known the results of the reappraisal that has been underway for the past two years. It will give the federal government an opportunity to make known its views and its intentions in this field. It will also allow for a general discussion on the matters in question and for a dialogue with the public on the methods to be used with regard to income security in Canada in the next ten years.

I ask the government of Canada to include in this white paper proposals relating to the establishment of a guaranteed minimum income plan for Canadians.

[English]

**Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Mr. Speaker, although there are one or two aspects of the motion now before us with which I must take exception, I should like as my first word to commend the hon. member for Portneuf (Mr. Godin) on bringing before us once again the question of a guaranteed income for the Canadian people. While I am in a mood to extend congratulations, may I also commend the hon. member for Saint-Jacques (Mr. Guilbault) on his insistence that our concern for those living in poverty should not be confined to persons and families on relief, social welfare and so on. He makes the point very well when he emphasizes that many people who are working are on incomes so low that they too are living in poverty. As a matter of fact, I suspect the figure he gave of four million Canadians really existing in poverty is probably a conservative one. I suggest this figure probably is five million or more.