

Canada-U.S. Food-Aid Program

I have been trying to scout around to find out in general what the United States has been doing in this field. I know its main two programs are being administered by its department of agriculture. One is the food stamp program and the other the commodity distribution program. The food stamp program was launched with a single pilot project ten years ago, in 1961. Three years later the U.S. Congress authorized its implementation throughout the United States. I also know that the U.S. has been distributing food commodities for a good many years. The U.S. has a ten-year head start on us in the distribution of food to people living on low incomes. Is it any wonder, Mr. Speaker, that I wanted the information which the Department of Agriculture had compiled in this respect?

But responsible people in the United States are not fully happy with their food aid programs. Pressure is being exerted to have the programs brought up to date and much more nutritionally directed. In many cases, in the beginning, the distribution of surplus food products was undertaken just as much for the convenience of the producers as to aid those on low incomes. As I say, as a result of in-depth study, people in the United States are coming to realize that these programs must be consumer-oriented and that greater emphasis must be placed on nutrition. I say that they are very far from satisfied. A year ago, on April 27, a report was issued by the chief of the nutrition program of the United States health services and mental health administration in Washington, Dr. Samuel F. Schaefer. Referring to this report, an article in the *Ottawa Citizen* read in part:

● (5:10 p.m.)

Hunger and malnutrition in the United States strikes pre-school children and adolescents from poverty-ridden families the hardest, resulting in reduced growth and possible mental retardation—

It seems very foolish of us to concern ourselves only with the problem of mental retardation from the standpoint of trying to cure or palliate it when we are being warned by authorities to the south that it is probably caused to a large degree by poor nutrition. The article continues:

In a survey prepared for the Senate committee on hunger and human needs, Dr. Samuel F. Schaefer said: "By far, the most frequently malnourished age groups are pre-school children and adolescents. The younger population is the key contributor to the finding of serious malnutrition in the sample population as a whole."

Dr. Schaefer also said:

There is no longer any doubt that the incidence of malnutrition is related to poverty-level incomes. The poorer you are, the more likely you are to suffer from serious malnutrition.

Although there is malnutrition in all groups of pre-school children and adolescents, there is as well malnutrition among groups with the fashionable diet of Coke, pop and chips. It is far more prevalent in the low-income groups, however. In the United States they have done something more than the establishment of these programs. I would like to quote from the testimony of Senator Joseph S. Clark who, when speaking on the subject of

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

establishing a select committee on nutrition and human needs in 1968, said:

The committee is convinced, after hearing from these witnesses—

This was after doctors had travelled throughout the various states in the south where poverty was most prevalent.

—that chronic hunger and malnutrition do exist extensively in the United States. In some areas and among some people it is an all too familiar way of life. Many of those who are chronically hungry seem also to want for essential clothing, shoes, soaps, medical care and education. There is an identifiable geographical nature to some of the pockets of hunger; there are some identifiable dietary deficiencies among low economic groups in some of these areas. The majority of those who are chronically hungry in the United States come from low-income families with the incidence increasing as income level declines.

The message of the President to the Congress of the United States on May 6, 1969, makes the following point:

The federal government presently provides food assistance to nearly seven million needy Americans through the food stamp and direct distribution programs.

If there are seven million Americans in need of food through direct distribution of their food stamp plan, there will be a considerable number of Canadians in great need of supplemental diets and food assistance. We usually measure our needs by about one-tenth of those of the United States. This constitutes a very sizeable number of Canadians in need of supplemental assistance.

I would plead with the government to make these documents available to those who want to study them. I should also like, before the Canadian nutrition survey is available, to learn something of the experience of those to our south. They have come to grips with the problem earlier than we have, perhaps because their pressures are so much greater. If we knew their experience to date it would help us enormously in preparing to deal with the report of the Canadian nutrition survey when it appears.

I appeal to the Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Olson) and to the Department of National Health and Welfare to initiate at the earliest possible moment committee investigations into conditions concerning nutrition in this country. There is no reason why we should not research another country's experience first. It would save us a good deal of time and grief if we had their background.

I conclude by urging again that the policy of keeping useful reports away from members of this House be discontinued. The government, which has begun to open up by consulting groups who are not members of this House and putting individuals on boards and committees, should follow through by allowing members of the House full access to documents and reports. All hon. members would find this extremely useful in the work they are trying to do.

Mr. Jerry Pringle (Fraser Valley East): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I should like to thank the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) for the homework she has done and for the explanation and information she has given us on the importance of nutrition. Having been involved in the food business for a number of years I can