

Guaranteed Income

see large deductions coming off their pay checks in the form of income tax and unemployment insurance.

Government spokesmen talk about having lowered the income tax. Unemployment insurance payments are another form of tax these people have to pay. They look at their pay checks and ask: What are we working for? We are barely getting enough to live on. We shall never get enough to be able to buy a home. We are in what appears to be a much poorer position today than our parents and grandparents were years ago, because they were able to purchase houses in which to live. What chance have we of getting a home today, with the high cost of land and the high cost of building?

It makes them do things we do not like to see done about the work ethic. They say to themselves: Why should I work? Why should I not take advantage of all the programs which will keep me going? I do not really need to work. So, viewed as a whole, the system is not doing what it is designed to do. We talk about a guaranteed annual income. I do not believe we should talk about a guaranteed annual income in isolation. I think we should be talking about guaranteed employment at the same time. We certainly do not want to bring in any type of program that teaches people not to work.

We have established a welfare program administered by many levels of government. It is not palatable to many people, although I should like to think there is no one in Canada today who would not be looked after. In many instances people in need would have to go on welfare. With the pride people have, they do not want to do that kind of thing. If we brought in guaranteed employment and a guaranteed annual wage, we could do away with welfare. Let's do away with welfare. Let's think of guarantees for the old, the infirm and those who just cannot work—not people who will not work, but those who cannot work. Those who are paying the cost of these programs, particularly the young people entering the work force today, are not fooled. They can see what is going on. They can see the bureaucracies which are built up. They realize the high cost of administering all these programs, and they can see they are not really working. Many people have not received what they ought to have received under these programs.

If we can do something about the high cost of maintaining these bureaucracies, if we can streamline the administration, I believe something useful might come from programs of this type. As it is, one department often appears not to know what the other is doing. Sometimes it does not even care. Look at the Canada Pension Plan. I receive many letters from housewives who are not able to take advantage of this plan, from people who have less than somebody else is receiving, from people who have not earned enough to get anything really useful from the scheme. We should look at all these programs, starting with welfare and unemployment insurance, and try to produce a system which is better suited to our needs. I close by saying we should in no circumstances do anything to destroy the work ethic in Canada.

Mr. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, when parliamentarians debate poverty and social assistance plans they inevitably become engaged in a search for improvements and better methods. It would be surprising

[Mr. Whittaker.]

if it were otherwise, since regardless of what the cynics may say, men and women who go into politics do so with a desire to improve the shape of society. This is what the debate today is all about.

Much has been said about poverty on this continent. Volumes of reports have been written about the subject. A Senate committee investigated it recently. Obviously there are other forms of poverty beside economic poverty. There is poverty determined by isolation, by lack of qualities in life which may have little to do with economic well-being. If we limit ourselves to the narrow issue of poverty in economic terms, we can find it in many regions of Canada both rural and urban. It can be found in the most unexpected quarters. Consider the men or women who have worked all their lives in construction, in a factory or in a place not conducive to good health, and who toward the end of their working lives, say in their fifties, find they can no longer remain gainfully employed due to their difficult conditions and proudly refuse any form of public assistance.

● (2040)

Poverty can also be found among the victims of an accident or of a progressive disease, persons who can no longer continue to be the breadwinner for their families. It can also be found among injured workmen, victims of accidents at work who are suddenly pensioned off at rates set under provincial laws, people who may have lost a limb at work while making a productive contribution to society, or people who have broken their backs and who as a result may also have to go on welfare and whose income as determined under provincial laws is inadequate. We see many examples in large urban areas of people on pensions that are not tied to the cost of living index, such as workmen's compensation pensions, or whose pensions are not adjusted over the years.

Poverty can be found among those who work for wages at minimal levels, people with large families struggling to make ends meet and to give their children an adequate education. Sometimes there may even be temporary difficulties which perhaps lead to situations that cannot be termed poverty but near poverty, such as when a family has to face unexpected dental bills for one of its members. In this respect it is very reassuring to see what is being done presently by the province of Saskatchewan through its program of dental care. As well, we had the announcement today by the province of Quebec.

It is against this background of poverty, which others have defined much better than I have, that in designing a system in society that leads to a guaranteed annual income one would inevitably create legislation of the kind that we have today in Canada. Allow me to expand on that for a moment. It is really a legislative framework that seems to me to consist of six basic pieces of legislation: the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan, the Unemployment Insurance Act, income tax, the guaranteed income supplement and family allowance.

Time does not permit me to discuss in depth these various tools which over the decades successive governments—and here I must stress successive Liberal governments—have developed for the benefit of Canadians. These tools are available and they are working, but as