

Social Security Policy

February 19, 1973. On that occasion the motion was phrased in terms similar to those of the motion today. The whole basis of the motion was to draw the attention of the House and of the government to one of the most urgent social problems confronting Canada at the present time. It is appropriate that for the debate this afternoon we have a representative group from across Canada present in the Speaker's gallery.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dinsdale: The technical aids committee which is sponsored by the Canadian rehabilitation Council for the Disabled has been in session throughout this day in an endeavour to come to grips with some of the problems outlined in the motion before us. Specifically, it has been concerned with making available the growing number of technical aids so that they may be put into service for the severely handicapped and chronically ill citizens of Canada, of whom there are many.

I trust that those who will take part in the debate this afternoon—and I am glad to see a representative attendance in the House—have taken the trouble to read the discussion which took place in 1973. That discussion took place at the beginning of the exercise of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) based on the presentation of the orange paper which resulted in a dialogue concerning social and health problems over the past two years which is about to come to a conclusion. We anticipate that some legislative recommendations will result from that long discussion between government and representative groups of the people of Canada.

During the previous debate I suggested that a logical method of handling the complex issues embraced in a rather lengthy resolution would be to refer the matter to a committee of this House, preferably a joint committee of the Senate and House of Commons, which could examine in depth all the problems relating to adequate policies and programs for the disabled population of Canada, so that representative groups could appear and a body of information could be brought together, and on the basis of the recommendations of that committee, policy recommendations could be co-ordinated to meet the need.

On that occasion the government declined to accept the recommendation. Now that the discussions with regard to the orange paper are reaching a point of action, I would hope that the recommendation would be accepted during the debate this afternoon so that after a period of two years we might have a body that would move toward implementation of the urgent needs that are set out in the resolution before us.

● (1710)

To tie into the debate on that occasion, let me point out that one of the main points I stressed was that the motion is designed to establish an atmosphere in society where there is genuine respect for the handicapped; where understanding is unostentatious and sincere; where, if years cannot be added to the lives of the very sick, at least life can be added to their years; where needs come before means; where the mobility of disabled people is limited only by the bounds of technical progress and discovery; where the handicapped have a fundamental right to par-

[Mr. Dinsdale.]

ticipate in industry and in society according to their abilities; where socially preventable distress is unknown; and where no man has cause to feel ill at ease because of disability.

Several members took part in that debate, including the hon. member for Lafontaine-Rosemont (Mr. Lachance), the hon. member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle) and the former hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway, Mrs. Grace MacInnis who is no longer with us. On that occasion also I quoted the Minister of National Health and Welfare to the effect that he was giving priority emphasis in his policy considerations to the needs of the handicapped. I believe that is still his emphasis. I quoted at that time from the speech that he made to the Montreal Chamber of Commerce on February 5, 1973. He said:

In the first place, the social security plan shall ensure to persons unable to work, the elderly, the blind and the disabled, an annual guaranteed income that is fair and compassionate.

This principle is already embodied in a whole series of measures which go back as far as 1927.

These programs, drawn up to meet special needs, have never been fully integrated; on the one hand, because they were adopted at different times for different purposes, and on the other hand, because it happened that the same program came under different jurisdictions.

Recently, the minister made a speech to the Empire Club of Canada. These are interesting and important groups in Canada and it is noteworthy that the minister is using these forums to press on with his crusade. The speech I refer to was made on October 31, 1974. In it he continued the emphasis of his earlier statement in 1973; he referred to the decisions that were about to be made with respect to the upgrading of the health and welfare program of the government, and said:

There will be a lot of decisions, and they will be difficult ones. What, for example, is the best way—the most humane and most efficient way—of meeting the income needs of those who are unable to work: the physically and mentally handicapped; the single mothers who must remain at home to raise and care for their children—

He listed a whole series of people in this category. I merely want to underline the stress on the physically and mentally handicapped. Later in the same speech the minister said:

Above all, how can we design the social security system so as to provide adequate income support, and increasingly a combination of income support and income from employment, to people who are handicapped and otherwise unable to achieve full independence, while at the same time ensuring that people who are able to work are found employment, thus enabling to achieve income security through income from employment.

You will see that this emphasis is continuing right down to the present moment. Much progress has been made since the initial debate in 1973, and perhaps it would be most useful at this time if I indicated some of the things that have happened since that time. For example, in March of 1973 there was a conference on technology and the handicapped. This took place with the support of the Department of National Health and Welfare at the Brooke Claxton complex, so obviously it had the official blessing of the government and the department. As a result of that conference there is much additional useful information upon which the government can base urgent action.

Also, since that occasion a committee known as the health care delivery committee was set up as part of the Canadian Association of Physical Medicine and Rehabili-