

Social Security

Mr. Martin: Your speech has been good up till now. Do not spoil it.

Mr. Gillis: I ask the government to consider seriously the enactment of an over-all health plan immediately. I think it is one of the basic needs of the country.

I also want to compliment the hon. member who has brought this resolution before the house. He has done it time and again, and this time we intend to see that he gets a vote on it.

Mr. W. G. Blair (Lanark): Mr. Speaker, I remember well when, in 1946, the hon. member for Terrebonne (Mr. Bertrand) brought this resolution into the house. I supported it at that time, and I am glad to say that the discussion took place all that afternoon and continued on until almost eleven o'clock at night, such was the interest of the house. But although I supported the resolution at that time I pointed out to the hon. member that there was with regard to it some faulty draftsmanship which defeated the object of the resolution itself. But now I find myself in complete agreement with the resolution as it is presented today.

I am glad the hon. member for Cape Breton South (Mr. Gillis) raised the matter of incurables. It is quite true that it is extremely difficult to define "incurable", and it is also extremely difficult, as we shall discover when we draft legislation for this bill, to state really what you mean by an incurable disease. That is more difficult to define than it would appear to be on the surface. To declare that a person is unemployable, as we are sometimes called upon to do, is also a matter of difficulty.

The hon. member was on sound ground on one matter to which he directed attention. I have had some personal experience in the matter of crippled children and service clubs. I happen to belong to a local Rotary club in my own home town, and I must say I was amazed at the results they have had in their campaign for crippled children. I sometimes wonder where the committee in charge of that work found all the cripples, inasmuch as I thought I knew most of the people for many miles around my own town. The work that they are doing to save people from the condition mentioned by the hon. member for Cape Breton South, namely being permanently disabled, is a marvellous one. But something more should be done, because we cannot expect the service clubs to cover a whole area or a whole county. It just cannot be done. But I have seen enough of this work to agree fully with the hon. member for Cape Breton South that much more could be done especially if it were a national project.

There is no doubt that some of the people who are mentioned in this resolution might be considered under other classes. We have arranged for the care of our veterans, and so far as they are concerned, in the matter of wounds and disabilities, they are very easy to judge because these things are apparent. But when the pensions board get down to the question of defining the amount of disability in regard to sickness, it is not always easy to deal with.

I call the attention of hon. members to the fact that this resolution is not as easy as it looks; but it is something that we must get down to business on and deal with. I have had other experiences in that matter. I have seen these crippled children, crippled mentally, in their homes. Just as the hon. member for Royal (Mr. Brooks) mentioned this afternoon, while their parents are living it is quite all right, they will be taken care of. When the parents die then the trouble begins. Sometimes they are found in very distressing circumstances, and they end up in the public ward of a hospital.

Perhaps there is no chance of doing anything along that line, except at the time they come in to build them up and recapture their health so far as you can. Then the hunt begins for a public institution to take care of them. Very little in the way of any arrangement has been made for these people who are below par mentally. They are really most difficult to deal with, because they are not of sufficiently low grade to be accepted in the mental hospitals, and it would be difficult to teach them and rehabilitate them in the way of carrying on some useful occupation.

I was impressed by the amount of work that has been done of late years in rehabilitation, especially of veterans. Many of these people—and I mention this to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin)—can be rehabilitated in some way to get a proper education to make a living for themselves. Many of these people never had the advantage of a proper education that they could use in earning a living.

I remember last spring when a group of incurables came to the House of Commons seeking some redress in this matter. Many of them were pitiable cases. You felt that something should be done for them. One could not see these people without being impressed with that fact. Later we had the old age security committee. That committee, sir, felt that something should be done, but there was nothing in the terms of reference which made it possible to deal with this situation.

I happen to be physician to a home for the aged in my own county. The other day