

*Guaranteed Annual Income*

of ensuring by law a guaranteed annual income as a means of ensuring that all Canadians will have an income sufficient to provide for a life of dignity.

• (5:00 p.m.)

He said: Mr. Speaker, since the election of 1968, in my judgment there have been only two meaningful and desirable pieces of legislation which we have passed. These are the languages bill on the one hand and the omnibus bill, offering a series of good, constructive amendments to the Criminal Code, on the other. Both these measures were inherited from the last Parliament; they were not generated by the present government, nor by members who presently sit in opposition. My conclusion is that nothing of significance has been done except for the passing of these bills which came from a previous government. Recently we saw the government increase the pensions to which Members of Parliament are entitled. We have watched the government trying to deal with inflation by putting thousands of Canadians out of jobs as a deliberate instrument of economic policy. Continuing consideration has been given to a white paper on taxation which has been masquerading as a document of significant reform, although it contains within it a proposal to continue taxing the poor in Canada. All this suggests to me something which must be regarded as the prevailing characteristic of the Trudeau government, namely, a small "c" conservatism which has done nothing to improve the social, economic, and, by extension, the spiritual well being of Canadians. This hour affords an opportunity for ordinary Members of Parliament in all parties to show that they are concerned about the well being of their fellow countrymen. They have an opportunity to vote for this resolution; they need not talk it out. I hope they will act upon it.

First, I should like to say something about the need for some form of guaranteed annual income or, as I call it, a guaranteed minimal annual income. To my mind, this represents the single most effective and efficient means of attacking, simultaneously, both material and spiritual poverty in this country. Of course, it is by no means the only action which could be taken to achieve progress in this direction, but by one stroke of legislation we could make an important advance. The object of this proposal is not simply to alleviate poverty in our land, but to eradicate it.

According to the Economic Council of Canada, the Canadian Welfare Council and other similar bodies in this country, there are

[Mr. Broadbent.]

between four and five million people living in a state of poverty in this rich country of ours. How does the Economic Council define poverty? It proposes that a family be regarded as poor if it spends 70 per cent or more of its income on food, clothing and shelter. I believe most hon. members will agree that this is a reasonable definition; any family which has to devote 70 per cent or more of its income to the provision of food, clothing and shelter has little left with which to do, or acquire, those other things which hon. members of this House, for example, would regard as being the normal expectation of people living a civilized existence. Virtually no money is left for recreation in any of its forms. There is no separation, as many like to suggest, between material conditions and spiritual life. There is an inextricable connection between the two. They are bound together. In seeking to overcome material poverty we will be laying the foundation for a fuller spiritual life.

Who are the poor? They include the 50,000 or more who receive old age assistance benefits. They include more than 700,000 elderly persons who receive a guaranteed income supplement. They include the young men and women who have recently left school and who cannot find jobs—incidentally, these represent the fastest growing section of the unemployed. You will find the poor among our Indian, Eskimo and Metis population whose life expectancy is just over half what it is for the rest of us in Canada—surely, a national disgrace. You will find them among the women receiving mothers' allowances—over 165,000 of them—and you will find them among that grotesquely overlooked groups of people, the blind and the disabled who receive special allowances. Thousands fall into this category. Most of these people receive welfare assistance in some form, inadequate though it may be. To some degree, therefore, they are present in the consciousness of Canadians throughout the country.

However, in addition to helping people such as these, a guaranteed minimum income would benefit the group of people who are consistently overlooked not only by those responsible for legislative programs but also by the average citizen. I refer to the working men and women of all ages who are unable to earn sufficient in their jobs to escape from a state of poverty. Most of them are non-unionized workers. Let us not forget that less than a majority of the working people of Canada belong to unions, the worst record of any industrialized country in the world. The group I have in mind consists, too, of workers,