

*Health and Welfare*

Are we talking about the retired employees of the government of Canada? Are we talking about retired members of the armed forces? Are we talking about those persons in receipt of old age security pensions, in receipt of old age assistance, in receipt of aid to the disabled, in receipt of blind pensions, and those who are in receipt of unemployment assistance and general assistance at the local level, which is in part reimbursed to the provinces through federal grants? Are we considering family allowance recipients who, in a sense, are pensioners—if we define “pensioners” as persons in receipt of regular payments from the government of Canada?

The matter of definition has not been faced by the sponsor of this motion, and surely one of the first things we should give attention to is the definition of those who would be eligible for benefits. For example, I find in the last report tabled by the Minister of National Health and Welfare, which states that in March, 1962, there were 927,590 persons receiving old age security. These are certainly federal government pensioners, and their numbers are now approaching one million.

At that time there were 6,562,287 children receiving federal monthly payments. Their numbers again have increased fairly substantially since that date. There were just about 100,000 persons receiving old age assistance, over 50,000 persons receiving aid to the disabled, and 8,750 persons receiving blindness allowances. There were something of the order of 600,000 persons benefiting from the unemployment assistance payments, which were credited through the provinces to the municipalities administering the benefits at the local level.

Surely, Mr. Speaker, we have to define the coverage. I listened carefully to the hon. member moving the motion, and my impression is that he was talking about those persons who are retired employees of the government of Canada. I wish he, or those who will speak in support of it, would clarify this particular point. I would like to know just what particular group of citizens we are talking about, because if we take a definition of pensioner to be anyone who is receiving benefits from the government of Canada, we come up with a very substantial portion of the population of our country. We are talking about something like seven and three quarter millions of persons, something in excess of 40 per cent of the population of Canada, if we take the broadest possible interpretation. If this is the intent of the mover of the motion, then obviously this is a measure of very substantial financial magnitude.

If its intention is to define in a much more restrictive sense the persons who are eligible,

he has failed to do this so far in the debate; and I think one of the first rules of debate is to define the terms we employ so everybody will know what we are talking about.

We are also talking about benefits. Again, the mover of the resolution is most generous; he wants to provide free medical, surgical, dental and ophthalmological care. This is a very comprehensive approach to health services. I personally—and I am sure this applies to every hon. member of the house—regret any circumstances in which persons in Canada, no matter who they are, are not able to receive adequate health services. Certainly the World Health Organization, in its definition of health as being the complete social, mental and physical well being of a person, takes a comprehensive approach to the problem and suggests that this type of service is one of those things which citizens in a democratic society have some right to expect. The problem, again, is this: It is one thing to respect the right to services; it is another thing, in an omnibus resolution, to bring about a revolutionary, overnight change in a measure under which something like 40 per cent of the population of the country could receive such services, if that is the intention of the mover of the resolution.

If it is his intention to deal only with a small, restricted group of persons who are former employees of the government of Canada, without regard to a means test, that is an entirely different proposition and one I would not be prepared to accept in those terms, any more than I am prepared to accept the omnibus resolution. If it is the concern of the mover of the resolution to deal with various categories of disabled persons, blind persons, recipients of old age assistance—and there was a reference in his opening statement to such persons—I think he has an obligation to look at the services being now provided province by province across Canada. In one breath the mover of this resolution talks about constitutional problems; he is very anxious that the federal government should not invade anything that is a provincial responsibility or provincial prerogative. Health traditionally has been a provincial responsibility in Canada, and the federal government's role in this field has been largely developed in the direction—I say largely; there are some provisos which I want to deal with later—of making grants in aid to the provinces for hospital insurance and diagnostic services provided by the hospital. The Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act is an example of this. That is a good example of the role the federal government plays in this field, and the rights of the provinces and their primary obligations in this area have been carefully safeguarded.