

*Distribution of Goods and Services*

The figures that the Economic Council of Canada has produced show that well over half of the heads of those families that are living below the poverty line are members of the working force who work part or all of the year. Poverty is not confined just to those who are old or unable to work, just to those who are on unemployment insurance, welfare or relief of some kind. For far too many of our people life goes on in a very humdrum fashion because although they are working, although they have the conventional means of livelihood in the form of wages that they receive, the amount is inadequate to maintain a decent standard of living. Many of these people are poor from the cradle to the grave, poor not only economically but in any opportunity to enjoy the so-called better things of life. It is all right for us who are here in this place to indulge in the making of fine speeches about the greatness of our culture and our tradition. It is all right for us to boast about the progress that our country has made. It is all right for us to be excited, as we are today, about adventures in the field of science, even if they are being carried on by people from another country. But for far too many of our people in this latter part of the 20th century life is too much a story of poverty.

I say to the hon. member for Témiscamingue that this is no day for the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion or for the hon. member for Edmonton West (Mr. Lambert) to spend their speaking time castigating him for his particular political philosophies. This is a day for us to face up to the facts of poverty and somehow to get to the point where we realize that it is our responsibility to do something about these facts.

● (5:00 p.m.)

Later in this debate one or more of my hon. friends, depending upon how much time is available, will have something to say about some of the specific things we think should be done to provide a greater quantity of goods and services. There is the whole question of the priorities to be established between the private and the public sector; there is the question whether the role of the government when times are tough is to curtail expenditure or increase it.

We admit that if we are to provide a decent standard of living for all our people there has to be production of goods and services in even greater abundance than we are managing today, and we believe there are policies which governments can pursue to increase

the quantity of goods and services we produce. But along with the production of goods and services in abundance it is also of extreme importance that we follow policies of a kind which will get those goods and services distributed among our people on a fair basis. Some day it will be argued politically—and I hope the argument will prevail—that goods ought to be distributed on a basis of equality.

This is a word we seem to avoid. The hon. member for Edmonton West thought it was ridiculous for somebody to be saying that the richest person in the country should not receive more than five times as much as the poorest. That attitude will be laughed at some day; in fact, some of us laugh at it today. But if we are not yet ready for the distribution of goods and services on the basis of equality it is time for us to do it on a basis that is fair, and if it is to be fair there will have to be minimum standards that mean something; there will have to be guarantees of sufficient income to provide a decent standard of living applicable to all our people.

We say therefore that the social legislation which has been placed on the statute books of this country in the last 50 years—I say 50 years because certain things got started in 1919—should not be subject to ruination—and I see the possibility of this happening when the government talks about doing away with family allowances and putting old age pensions back on some kind of means or income test. I believe that if we are really concerned about maldistribution we must increase the amounts which get into the pockets of our people through programs which aim at distribution. We ought not to cut back these programs.

We have been asked to point to specific programs and proposals. Well, we say that family allowances should be increased. We say that old age security pensions should be increased. We say that war veterans allowances should be increased. We say that the federal government should really put money into education, that it should really put money into housing on a basis which would provide housing for the people who need it. These are proposals which are specific. They could and must be carried out.

Certainly there is a need for policies which will increase the amount of goods and services we produce. We also say it is essential to have policies leading to the effective distribution of goods and services to our people. This is not done by way of free competition in the marketplace. It can only be done when the government in the name of all the people

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]