

Canada Assistance Plan

would ultimately result in the creation of thousands of jobs across this nation in port cities such as St. John, Halifax, Vancouver and Quebec. It would mean a tremendous boost to the economy of the more depressed areas of this nation, such as those in New Brunswick and others in Atlantic Canada. It would mean a great deal to the citizens of those areas. It would mean that they could walk the streets with their heads held up high, knowing that they had jobs and did not have to go to the welfare or social assistance office, knowing that they did not have to come to Ottawa to petition their Members of Parliament to go to the Government and encourage an increase in welfare payments to the provinces.

We could be substantially more self-sufficient if the Government were to take a positive approach to encourage investment in this country, but it seems to take just the opposite point of view. What a pity, what a shame, that rather than standing up here today and discussing how we will make this country more vibrant through the establishment of a new shipbuilding facility, a new steel facility or a new ancillary facility for some industry which could be meaningful in terms of creation of jobs, we must speak about providing more social assistance so that people can go to the welfare offices and perhaps not be turned down as often as they are today.

Mr. Cyril Keeper (Winnipeg-St. James): Mr. Speaker, I have some brief remarks to make with regard to this motion. We will obviously allow time for the Government to respond, so we will not take up all the time that is available for this motion. First, I would just say that I think it is a good motion because it calls for the production of papers, papers which should be public. They should be readily available to people. I understand that one of the problems under this Canada Assistance Plan is that ordinary citizens, people interested in these programs falling under the Plan, have difficulty in finding out the full information with regard to the programs.

The Canada Assistance Plan is really a cost-sharing arrangement between the Provinces and the federal Government on a 50 per cent basis in order to provide social assistance across this country so that people can have their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter met. There are some good arguments why certain Provinces, such as New Brunswick, which are mentioned in this motion should have a more generous cost-sharing relationship than richer Provinces. For example, the Federal Task Force on Fiscal Federalism in Canada, a task force which was manned by a number of Members of this Parliament and which made recommendations in this area, recommended that in the case of have-not provinces, there should be a cost-sharing relationship which would require the Federal Government to pay 75 per cent of the cost and the have-not Provinces to pay 25 per cent. I think that is a good idea and would improve the Canada Assistance Plan.

However, I want to refer to the sort of central notion behind the Plan, which is that every citizen in Canada, every human being, has a right to have his basic human needs met, needs of food, clothing, shelter and recreation. These needs are normally met by the economy, by employment. In other words, if one

has a job, not only does one receive the pleasure and satisfaction of doing one's work and the fulfillment that comes from being active, but one also receives a paycheque and can therefore meet the basic needs of one's family. The problem today, of course, is that a great number of Canadians, well over 2 million in real terms, do not have employment.

We hear many predictions from respected agencies, such as the Economic Council of Canada, that very high levels of unemployment will continue for a long period of time to come, perhaps four or five years, and that even after the so-called recovery arrives, we will have 10-plus per cent unemployment. That was really quite unheard of in Canada. We will have to do some very hard thinking should these predictions actually come to pass. Obviously, the first thing we should do is to take a look at how we manage the economy in this country. How do we create wealth? How do we create employment? It is evident today that we are not doing a very good job of that.

The fundamental change in policy and direction that we must make is not to rely upon monetary and fiscal policies alone as instruments of managing the economy because that is no longer sufficient. We must move beyond that point. We must adopt an approach today which allows the Federal Government, in consultation with provincial governments, labour, business and the financial community, to set some national economic goals for this country. Other countries have done this, countries such as Japan, Sweden and Germany, countries which have a lower level of unemployment than we have today. Our unemployment rate is at 12.2 per cent. Their rates are at much more modest levels. It is important to take note of the unemployment rate in the context of the Canada Assistance Plan because, as I said earlier, it is normally through employment and the income derived from employment that our basic human needs are met. It is only because some people cannot have employment that we must create something like the Canada Assistance Plan. I would therefore hope that in the not too distant future this country would make a very clear decision to move beyond treating the economy through the use of the traditional instruments of economic management which I have mentioned, fiscal and monetary policies, and begin to set some national economic goals, to take economic management, direction and development seriously.

● (1740)

I must again refer to the predictions I referred to earlier. The prediction is that even after the recovery, we will have unemployment in this country in the 10 per cent range. There will be many more people in this country without income to meet their human needs. They will not receive it through the normal accepted way of distributing income in our society.

In order to face up to that question, we will have to do some serious thinking as to how income is distributed in this country, for example, whether the Canada Assistance Plan is adequate. When we have the recovery and begin to face the real question of long-term unemployment, it will be time for us to look at an idea which is perhaps considered passé today, that is, guaranteed annual income.