

The Special Senate Committee on Poverty

Evidence

Ottawa, Thursday, October 15, 1970

[Text]

The Special Senate Committee on Poverty met this day at 9 a.m.

The Clerk of The Committee: Honourable senators, I call the meeting to order. Is it your pleasure to elect a chairman?

Senator Carter: I move that Senator Croll be chairman.

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Senator David A. Croll (Chairman) in the Chair.

The Chairman: Honourable senators, before introducing our witnesses, I should like to deal with three or four routine matters as this is the first meeting of this committee in the new session.

The first item is the selection of a deputy chairman. I am sure all senators will agree that this position should be filled by Senator Fournier (Madawaska-Restigouche).

Senator Ferguson: I so move.

Hon. Senators: Agreed.

Note: At this point a number of administrative matters were resolved.

(Please see Minutes of Proceedings).

The Chairman: We have before us this morning the Family Bureau of Greater Winnipeg. Sitting on my immediate right is Mrs. Phyllis Hogan. Next to her is Mrs. Marie Havens and then Miss Jacqueline Briscoe. Then there is Mrs. Menzias, Mrs. Campbell and Mrs. Richards.

Now Mrs. Hogan will take a few minutes to discuss the brief and then we will have the question period.

Mrs. Phyllis Hogan, Family Bureau of Greater Winnipeg: First of all we wish to thank you for inviting us to Ottawa to present our brief in person.

We are here under the auspices of the Family Bureau of Greater Winnipeg, however, we feel that we are representative not only of our committee and the Family Bureau, but of all the families in Canada who belong to what is termed "the working poor". We represent families who find themselves in the low-income group not only because of the normally accepted social ills, but also those families who find that in order to maintain the accepted standard of living both parents must work, and families who would have a sufficient income in normal circumstances but find their resources drained by ill health or business reverse.

We feel that the stigma attached to welfare recipients could be alleviated by making known to all the people in this wonderful country of ours that for every one person who abuses the welfare system, there are many many more who try to work to maintain decent standards. However, due to the lack of knowledge of what they have a right to request by way of assistance, whether resource-wise, monetarily or, and what is sometimes more important, moral support, these people often find that the load is too heavy and finally give up in bitterness and frustration: thereby, they become totally dependent on the welfare system. We formed our committee primarily because essential services which were being, and still are, provided to us, by the Family Bureau, were threatened with being curtailed, due to lack of funds. These are the "day care" and "homemaker" programs. We found, on discussion, that although this was a prime concern, there were many other problems which needed studying. These we have outlined in our brief.

We found that our main concern was the care of our children, who, we feel, are the ones who will suffer if assistance is not forthcoming soon. This is extremely important for, through our children, Canada will be seriously affected in the future. We, the working poor, make up a large portion of the total population, and, unless some stable plans are resolved, whether it be by a guaranteed annual income, or by the provision of special resources, we are in trouble. We feel that the resource area is a more effective way as we all must realize that money alone cannot buy health, happiness and human dignity, whereas resources, such as upgrading, recreational facilities, buyers clubs and other essential services give us an incentive to help ourselves. We would also point out that we are well aware that, basically, the resource services boil down to dollars and cents as well, but they can be administered in a much more humane way.

Further, we feel that amalgamating welfare systems, whether at the federal, provincial or municipal level and delivery service on a community scale, would involve more of the people themselves, and would better inform us of all the combined facilities that could be forthcoming to ourselves and our children. We should always keep in mind that an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

We feel that the people of Canada, including all income brackets, should be educated to the realization that the working poor need help now: educated in order to make everyone aware that our problems, for the most part, are caused by circumstances beyond our control: advised that we don't want "hand-outs", and that we want the many, many people who believe that welfare is a "dirty" word, instead of saying or thinking "What can you expect?", to turn around and begin to ask, "How can we help you?"

[Translation]

Mrs. Marie Havens, Member of the Family Bureau of Greater Winnipeg: We are happy to have the opportunity of providing you with additional information on the memorandum we have submitted.

Poverty is a human condition often analysed but seldom understood. This is perhaps due to the very limited opportunities for