

Inquiries of the Ministry

It would not only be necessary to find summer employment for the students, but we should also guarantee them a pre-salary, in order that their intellectual development should not be dependent on summer employment.

● (2:20 p.m.)

[English]

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

PENSIONS

RESPONSIBILITY FOR PAYMENT OF ASSISTANCE TO THE AGED

Hon. Robert L. Stanfield (Leader of the Opposition): I should like to ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare a question arising out of the answer he gave me yesterday indicating that the government of Canada would be prepared to share in the cost of supplemental old age assistance provided the province concerned put up 50 per cent of the cost. Are we to assume from this statement that it is now the position of the government of Canada that it will not accept the full responsibility for payment of assistance to the aged in spite of the fact that it has accepted full responsibility for quite a number of years?

Hon. John C. Munro (Minister of National Health and Welfare): The situation has always been that if any province felt that the federal payments for old age security or for the guaranteed income supplement were inadequate, for various reasons within the province such as the cost of living and so on, the formula under the Canada Assistance Plan would provide that type of flexibility based on the criteria that additional funds would be given to the people who are receiving old age security, the guaranteed income supplement or other assistance payments from the province itself. That situation has existed now for at least four or five years ever since the inception of the Canada Assistance Plan.

Mr. Stanfield: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. I assume the minister would agree that the present payments are inadequate. Is the government prepared to pay more old age assistance to old people in one part of the country as opposed to those in another part of the country provided only that the provincial governments are sufficiently well to do to be able to find the 50 per cent of the cost which the minister specifies?

Mr. Munro: The situation in Canada has always been that in certain areas of the country benefit levels have been higher due to the cost of living. Where that situation exists and the province pays out more money we still provide our 50 per cent share in which case we are spending more money in that province or in that region.

Mr. Stanfield: I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. We are getting a new look at the just society. Is it the position of the government that payments for old age assistance are inflationary if the government of Canada bears 100 per cent of the cost but are not inflationary if the province pays 50 per cent of the cost?

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. May I ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare whether the statements he made yesterday and today are a preview of the government's white paper on social security, or is the door still open for increasing the rate of the universal portion of the old age security payment?

Mr. Munro: I would advise the hon. member that the door is still open and that what I have said yesterday and today is nothing new at all. This has been the situation for the last four or five years, as I said, and I am only surprised that the Leader of the Opposition is so totally unaware of the program in which he himself and his province participated.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. If the door is still open, is the government giving serious consideration to the universal principle rather than going back to an income test or a split federal and provincial responsibility?

Mr. Munro: Mr. Speaker, the universal principle, income testing and the guaranteed annual income concept all have to be considered in any over-all review of social welfare policies, and they are being considered.

Hon. Marcel Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, my question is whether the agreements between the government of Canada and the provinces under the Canada Assistance Plan provide that the provinces may avail themselves of the privilege of low-