

Blindness Allowance

sons. I agree, and that time may come. What bothers me in all these fields, especially when we go into the general programs that do not recognize categories, is the continuance of the idea of the means test.

The hon. member for Selkirk and the hon. member for Bruce-Grey both talked about sympathy for the blind, and the hon. member for Cumberland-Colchester North (Mr. Coates) emphasized that all of us in this House have that sympathy. But, Sir, the basic difference is that the motion before us wants a universal non-means test pension for persons who suffer from blindness, whereas the hon. member for Bruce-Grey wants us not to go that route but to provide assistance for the blind under a means test or some kind of social assistance program. I take my stand on the same side of the issue as the hon. member for Selkirk. Perhaps he will allow me to say I have been taking it since long before he was of voting age. I regret that we are not giving special consideration to the blind as I believe they deserve.

This is a private member's motion. I believe we should support such a motion and I do not want to be guilty of seeming to talk something out and therefore I shall conclude my remarks. I said that if I had been consulted by the hon. member for Selkirk before he drafted his motion I might have offered a couple of suggestions. One is that I do not think the \$200 figure is high enough. Today when we have responsible bodies suggesting that a person needs \$350 or \$400 just to exist, or \$700 for a couple, I do not think \$200 a month per person is high enough. Maybe the hon. member drafted his motion a long time ago and has not brought it up to date.

The other thing I should have liked was for the escalation to be on a quarterly rather than on an annual basis. I am not arguing that there is a great deal of difference between the two formulas but we already have a situation where a number of pensions are escalated quarterly and others only annually. Those who get their escalation annually feel they are being short-changed, as they are if you do the arithmetic all the way down. I am glad to see the hon. member for Selkirk nodding his head. If we could get this motion passed and get it to committee for consideration, perhaps those two changes could be made. In any case, I take my stand again for pensions as of right without a means test for those Canadians who suffer from blindness.

● (1750)

[Translation]

Mr. Bernard Loiselle (Chambly): Mr. Speaker, I feel that the suggestion made by the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Whiteway) makes a lot of sense, but three hon. members have already taken part in the debate. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) did not share exactly the views of the hon. member for Selkirk, so that in spite of the odiousness of this action, I shall have to fight in the House against this suggestion and this for the following reasons.

Like the government I represent, I am very much concerned by the problem of the blind, by the handicap of these people, but instead of considering individual cases, this Liberal

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

administration, which is in agreement in principle with the concept of helping the blind, cannot support a social security system which would be based on categories. It feels that the need is of greater importance than the root cause of this need, whatever the handicap may be, whether old age, mental deficiency or physical disability. It feels that any handicapped person, whatever the nature of the handicap, should receive assistance from the government.

That is why, since 1973 and together with the provincial governments, this administration has been carrying out all sorts of studies which have already resulted in a guaranteed income plan for all these handicapped persons, and following consultations since June 1976 with the province of Quebec under the Bourassa administration, the federal government will introduce, between now and June 1977, a bill to provide for the assistance of handicapped persons because they cannot support themselves, and not for any so-called compensation we may owe them. We shall give them a minimum income if they really cannot earn it themselves. But what we shall try to give them instead is the means to help themselves.

Practically all disabled persons ask us to let them help themselves. And I think it is most pernicious to think that it is enough to give them a \$200 cheque as the hon. member for Selkirk said, or a \$450 cheque escalated on a quarterly basis, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) said. I suggest that the most important aspect when we are talking about physical disabilities of any kind is never to forget human dignity. That is why the government wants to introduce a social service bill which will respect the principle whereby all groups like the elderly or the disabled of any kind should have access to community services just as anybody else, and furthermore that the community should be responsible for making those services available to everyone.

I wonder why an unemployed man can take advantage of government manpower centre services while the handicapped—be it blindness, deafness or any other disability—do not have access to facilities enabling them to earn their living. The bill will be particularly aimed at extending the range or services available to the disabled and in addition its object will not only be to provide for the training of handicapped but to improve their ability to be self-sufficient. Among the items for which the provinces may demand cost sharing will be diagnostic and assessment services, uninsured health services, consultant services, pre-vocational training as well as an extensive series of services.

The federal government will bear over 50 per cent of additional transportation costs incurred by the physical handicapped to reach an adequate place of work. The federal government will pay increased grants to companies which would like to improve and set up facilities providing permanent jobs to the handicapped.

To my mind, the opposition errs in its proposals, as I said at the start, by classifying the handicapped in categories. I went to university with a handicapped student who took down his notes during classes as fast as I could myself, though I was not blind. What bothered him most, I feel, was the fact that he felt