

Social and Economic Security

ty, brutality, squalor and despair, I find it hard to accept the claim that the Trudeau government has hurled itself at the task of creating a Just Society, for I can find no trace in its legislative record of anything that touches the lives of these people in a meaningful way. Their numbers have, in fact, been swollen, first by the anti-inflation drive that froze new housing construction, then by the tight money policies which threw more and more people from the submerged third of society out of work. We have had welfare legislation that tinkers and fiddles and adjusts old, out-moded legislation so as to turn it into new out-moded legislation, we have had amendments and sub-amendments and regulations and directives, but we have not had, not once, not anywhere, any impatience or urgency or thrust toward social or economic reform.

No one expected the government to solve poverty in Canada—not with a fifth of our people and nearly half our rural families below the poverty line laid down by the Economic Council of Canada. What we did expect, what we had a right to expect, what we were led to expect, was a real, concerted, concerned attack on poverty and inequality. We have not had that. An examination of this government's legislative record shows it to be almost barren of meaningful social legislation. You needn't take my word for it. The Liberal party, always well-organized, puts out a mimeographed memorandum called "Liberal Government Achievements", which includes a list of all the legislation passed since the brave words of the first Trudeau Throne Speech rolled into the somnolent hush of the Senate Chamber in September, 1968. It is, to the casual reader, an impressive list, all the way from an act to amend the Judges Act, through such nuggets as the Dominion Coal Board Dissolution Act, the Saltfish Act down to an act to repeal the Leprosy Act.

There have been some sensible, worthwhile measures, which I'll discuss in a moment, but despite all the fanfare for a Just Society that preceded the Trudeau climb to the throne, despite the dashing to and fro of phalanxes of Trudeau aides, despite the disciplined muscularity of the Trudeau machine in the House of Commons, there has been precious little in the way of real government achievement.

It is as if the Prime Minister embraced Michael Oakeshott's description of the ruling role which is "to restrain, to deflate, to pacify and reconcile, not to stoke the fires of desire but to damp them down". It isn't so much that the Liberals since 1968 have succeeded in damping down the fires of desire, as that they have tried earnestly to do that, and apparently to do little else—

But together with the relief of poverty, we must not forget the pledge of the government in 1968 to afford opportunity for all Canadians, including opportunity for those who are employed but who are still living below the poverty line. Every Canadian, even those who are poor, is proud to be Canadian. And they want to work. They do not want to be on welfare rolls. It is to this end that we must strive to show the leadership which all Canadians need and for which responsibility we are charged.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues will be dealing with particular segments of the motion which I hope will make some impression on the government. Finally, I repeat, in a non-partisan manner. We have delayed too long to bring about meaningful programs to combat poverty in our country. I hope that the Minister of National Health and Welfare or the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) will offer us some words of wisdom as to the government's intentions in the area of economic and social policy to bring some hope to the poverty stricken of our country.

[Translation]

Mrs. Grace MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, I am sure there are among us many members who are deeply grateful to the Social Credit party for having put this motion today.

The leader of that party clearly outlined the situation of poverty in Canada and he duly reminded the government that the purpose of the country's economy should be above all the welfare of the population as a whole. He referred to many facts illustrating the complete failure of government policy in this regard.

[English]

The hon. member for Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe (Mr. Marshall), who has just spoken, made at least one point which in my opinion was outstanding, and which should be in the forefront of the minds of all of us as we discuss this subject today: At the present time more than 4.5 million Canadians are living in poverty. More than one third of these poor people are children under the age of 16. I suggest this fact alone should cause the government to decide that it should begin now to grapple seriously with the human problems in the economy, just as it has been grappling for a long time with the economic ones. It seems to me we have spent a long time dealing with the cement and concrete of the industries of this country; it is high time we began to consider what is happening to our people, our homes, families and children.

• (3:50 p.m.)

This has been brought vividly to the attention of all of us by the recent publication of the Senate committee report "Poverty in Canada". I was rather struck with the initiative that the Senate committee had taken. According to the report, in May 1970 it conducted a public opinion survey, through the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion, the results of which indicated that most Canadians considered \$6,500 to be the minimum acceptable annual income per family of four as at the date of the survey.

Following this the Senate committee on poverty promptly set a figure that was \$1,500 lower than the Canadian people believed was the acceptable minimum income, which I think is a very revealing indication that the Senate is completely out of touch with the needs of the people of this country, at least the needs of those living in poverty. I suggest its statement "That the Senate committee poverty-line incomes are not generous is demonstrated by this public opinion survey" is a masterpiece of understatement. I believe that the Senate committee on poverty, the Croll committee, has one fatal flaw: Instead of attempting to set a guaranteed income at the poverty line, it decided it could go one better and set a guaranteed income 30 per cent below the poverty line.

This proposal has been properly described by some authorities as a glorified welfare program, and by others, such as Dr. Baetz of the Canadian Council on Social Development, as guaranteed poverty. This is something like putting a band-aid over a serious cancer. You are hiding the sore from view and believing you have effected a cure. To solve the problem of poverty in this country by suggesting a minimum income that is 30 per cent below the poverty line is, in my view, nothing more nor less than an insult to those who already are suffering more than enough.

Thousands of people in poverty are asking the government for help, and a Senate committee produces a report recommending that these people have an annual income 30 per cent below the poverty line. No wonder the four