

*Old Age and Veterans' Pensions*

This, Mr. Speaker, is the technique being used by this government dedicated to the pursuit of the just society. It was used in the war on poverty, which has obviously died completely and now has been relegated to the obscurity of a Senate committee which I understand will be proceeding for many more months. In the meantime, the poor get poorer and the rich get richer. Certainly it is the technique that has been adopted in handling the excellent report of the Woods commission. The hon. member for Scarborough West (Mr. Weatherhead) has given us a summary of some of the features of the white paper arising from the Woods commission report on veterans pensions.

● (8:20 p.m.)

We agree that many of the suggestions in that report will be of benefit ultimately to the veterans of Canada. The problem, however, is that it has taken months, if not years to survey the problem up to the present time. The level and rate of payment right across the board on veterans pensions is way out of line because of the runaway inflation which has exercised the government to such a great extent during the past two years.

I hope that the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro), who is in the House tonight will enlighten us and give some assurances on the progress of this comprehensive review that has been under way for a considerable length of time. I read a speech that the hon. gentleman made to the Hamilton Chamber of Commerce in Hamilton in October, 1968. On that occasion the minister gave the definition of social welfare in the modern context. It is a definition that resulted from an international meeting of experts on welfare programs under United Nations' auspices. The following is the definition which the Minister of National Health and Welfare obtained from that source. According to him, social welfare is:

—a body of activities designed to enable individuals, families, groups, and communities to cope with the social problems of changing conditions... ensuring that the human and material resources of the country are effectively mobilized and deployed, to deal successfully with the social requirements of change—

The minister then added this postscript:

This, I think, is an excellent definition of the new role of welfare, so good, in fact, that one almost doesn't know where to begin in seeking to carry it out.

I think this explains the reason for the protracted process this government has adopted in approaching the solution of welfare

problems in modern Canadian society. It has been stalling its action because, as the minister said, it does not know where to begin. Well, you have to begin somewhere, Mr. Speaker. I refer to the excellent suggestions brought forward tonight that would deal with the two areas of urgent need. The first is, bring the pensions of our senior citizens into line with the cost of living immediately. That could be done and would have the unanimous support of members on all sides of the House. Second, let us deal with the disparity that has developed because of the long delay in the area of veterans benefits.

There is another aspect of the veterans program that I want to deal with specifically tonight. It concerns the suggestion that has come from the Minister of Veterans Affairs (Mr. Dubé) that the government, in its social planning, internal discussions and deliberations now in process, is moving in the direction of classifying veterans benefits as part of the general social welfare or social policy program. The hon. member for Scarborough West dealt with this matter and seemed to give his blessing to the current process. I do not want to misquote him. I listened carefully to what he said. He skirted around the subject by saying that veterans benefits are for special services rendered, but at the same time are regarded as coming within social policy as, for example, does the Workmen's Compensation program.

I disagree strongly and vehemently with this interpretation, Mr. Speaker. The Veterans' Charter in no way can be compared or related to the sort of compensation that is available under the Workmen's Compensation program. The very term Veterans' Charter indicates that the charter is a bill of rights, a separate Magna Carta given to the men and women who have served this nation, during World Wars I and II. It is unique from that standpoint. Any attempt on the part of this government or spokesmen for the government to downgrade that basic bill of rights for the veterans will be strongly opposed by the members of the official opposition, by members of veterans associations, and by the people of Canada.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard):** Order, please. I regret to interrupt the hon. member, but his time has expired.

**An hon. Member:** Carry on.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Béchard):** Does the House give unanimous consent?