

Social and Economic Security

provincial legislation, she no longer gets anything. In fact, the two of them only receive \$135, which, in my view, is quite inadequate to allow them to live decently.

There are also unemployment insurance benefits for certain provincial employees as, for instance, those of the Department of Highways. Sometime ago, at least, they were not eligible for unemployment insurance.

Even among the poor, there are complaints at times about irregularities. We can presume that this happens, but we can not prove it. Some way should be found to put an end to those irregularities. Responsible people tell us that some are drawing welfare cheques and could apparently do without them, while their neighbors who can hardly make both ends meet, are not entitled to the same benefits.

I read the report of the Senate committee on poverty to which I referred a while ago. We can hardly understand the deep causes of poverty and its destructive effects on the whole community.

Several members have suggested solutions earlier. The Liberal government has implemented several in the past, especially since 1968. The Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) intends to continue to do so, but he needs time as well as physical and financial opportunities.

If we go by the testimony of some of our electors, we can see they want to work. Means should be found to get people back into production, to make them work as they want to. Although long term programs may seem wiser, we should perhaps endeavour to set up progressive programs which would be applied by extremely competent and experienced people.

As some have suggested, namely the members of the special Senate committee on poverty, we must aim towards a guaranteed annual income which, it would seem, could not be set up easily overnight, in spite of what some may say.

And this solution, as suggested by some people, could easily be applied through the negative income tax method combined with an incentive to work, as many Canadians wish. The federal government, constituted by the Liberal Party, tends to realize these objectives as fast as possible.

Together, with the help of the federal government and of all governments of Canada and also, if possible, with the help of all those who are affected by poverty, we should try to develop a system to have those needy Canadians participate in the political decision, making process, in order to eradicate poverty some day.

I am with those who have confidence in this government, who can congratulate the government for the action it has taken and the realizations it authored, especially since 1968. We are hopeful that the government will continue to take action and to consider the problem as it is in order to study the best solutions and apply them.

[English]

Mr. John Lundrigan (Gander-Twillingate): Mr. Speaker, this evening, at 20 minutes to 10, I have the distinct honour of speaking on behalf of the Official Opposition on the serious problem of poverty. I have listened to speakers from all four parties. There has been a lot of sound and fury which signifies very little, to say the least.

[Mr. LeBlanc (Rimouski)]

Tonight I feel a little of the frustration of the people involved—the unemployed, poverty-stricken and helpless Canadians across this country. This afternoon the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) was present in this chamber. Tonight the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) is in the chamber for a while. He did not show up during the afternoon or, at the very least, the beginning of the debate. Neither the Minister of Manpower and Immigration (Mr. Lang) nor the acting minister have been in the chamber.

Mr. Munro: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Lundrigan: I know the minister is in Japan. I am talking about the acting minister.

Mr. Munro: Will the hon. member clarify his remarks about my presence in the House this afternoon? Was he inferring that I was just here at the beginning of the debate?

Mr. Lundrigan: I did not see the minister here for the whole debate. I have been here since the debate started. I have not seen the Minister of Manpower and Immigration, the acting minister or the parliamentary secretary. I have not seen the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) here today.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please.

Mr. Lundrigan: What for?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): I do not think the House will gain anything by having a roll-call of hon. members. The hon. member should speak to the motion.

Mr. Lundrigan: I am speaking to the motion. Today, in the House of Commons, we are talking about the most important problem facing this nation—the unemployment of half a million Canadians and the fact that there are over four million Canadians living below the poverty line. We are talking to an empty House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lundrigan: Two cabinet ministers have been in the House today. The members of the opposition are trying to state their points of view. We have been referring to the Economic Council's report, the Senate committee report on poverty and the economic development report.

An hon. Member: There are only seven of your members here.

Mr. Lundrigan: I do not see any advantage in members of the House of Commons standing in their place and speaking about poverty when the front bench, decision-makers of this country are not present. That is folly and it should be recorded. I would like to see the proceedings of this House being televised today so that the people of Canada could see the response of this elected government to poverty-stricken Canadians.

The Minister of National Health and Welfare had the gumption to come here tonight to speak politically and very beautifully about the guaranteed annual income and the pilot project which is costing \$15 million, while at the same time being married to it politically. He said to the members of this House and the Canadian people, "We think it might be the political thing to do because we