

Improving the Social Services

BY GEO. F. DAVIDSON

IT is a truism to state that the need for social services in Canada, as in all countries, is inevitably bound up with our economic development and economic policies: and that broad measures of economic planning such as those discussed elsewhere in this issue will do much to eliminate social need and social distress, which in turn will reduce the need for large scale social service programs of certain types. Sound economic planning produces economic security, which is part of, but not all of, social security.

This article will endeavour to limit itself to a discussion of the social services as such, avoiding so far as possible the temptation to trespass in those fields of economic planning which have as their purpose the achievement of what might be called a specific social objective: for there is no desire here to go over the ground that has been more ably covered in other papers. It is not possible, however, to consider any social service program without some discussion of certain basic assumptions which impinge on the field of the economist. The best proof of this is to be found in the fact that for example economic policies designed to achieve the fullest possible measure of employment have obvious significance not only as economic but also as social service policies; for the achievement of economic security which would follow out of policies designed to create full employment would mean in itself a contribution of immeasurable significance to the attainment of the larger objective of social security. The degree of economic and social security which can be achieved by economic policies designed to provide the fullest possible measure of employment would, in turn, be greatly increased by an adequate supporting structure of minimum wage levels designed to produce from full

employment a living level for the employed that would truly be "freedom from want."

From this brief illustration it can be readily seen that by economic planning (designed to achieve full employment) and by adequate labor legislation (designed to assure a supporting structure of minimum wages),—neither one of which would be considered as falling primarily within the social service field,—it would be possible to attain a remarkable degree of economic and therefore to a lesser extent, of social security. Such policies, however, cannot achieve the entire objective without support from what is more obviously the social service field. For example, wage levels can hardly be made so high or so flexible as to fit the needs of every family unit, large or small: they can hardly be based on purely social considerations or on consideration of the size of the individual worker's family responsibilities. There must in fact be some retention of the principle of equal pay for equal work. The adjustment therefore of family income from wages earned to family responsibilities must be made in some other way,—outside the wage structure entirely. This adjustment, in the opinion of many, can best be made,—and it *must* of course be made, if economic security is to become a reality for individual families, large and small—through a system of family allowances, supplementing wages earned with an allowance as a matter of right, for every child in the family unit.

Full employment policies, plus adequate minimum wage levels, plus family allowances would therefore do much to lay the foundation for a broad system of social security, in which responsibility would have to be shared jointly by economic, legislative and social service measures. These measures however could provide only the first line of protection

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against the hazards of want and economic insecurity. It would be unwise to assume that full employment could be maintained continuously for each and every person—no matter how great our success with measures of economic reconstruction. Some protection must therefore be provided, as a second line of defense, against those various circumstances which create a break in the continuous line of an individual's employment, whether it be due to unemployment, sickness, accident, permanent disability, old age or death. More and more clearly the answer to these problems of community life is being sought in terms of the social insurances,—unemployment insurance, health insurance, workmen's compensation, disability insurance, old age insurance, survivors' or life insurance.

The Canadian people have already had a measure of experience with some of the programs outlined above,—notably with minimum wage legislation, workmen's compensation, and latterly with unemployment insurance. Further than that, we can of course profit greatly from the vastly richer experience of a number of other countries,—notably Great Britain, U. S. A., Australia, New Zealand, and,—if we are honest with ourselves,—Germany; for that nation's experience with social insurances extends back over half a century. The great weakness of our Canadian efforts, (in addition to the fact that, with the exception of workmen's compensation, they are all so recent), is that *first* they attempt to deal only in piecemeal fashion and in isolation with single phases of the overall problem; and, *second*, that the efforts which have been made, with the exception of unemployment insurance, have been provincial rather than national in scope. Consequently we lack not only an overall national program designed to produce economic or social security, but, worse than that, we lack, with the exception of unemployment insurance, even a national solution for any single phase of the total problem.

The moral of this, of course, is that if we desire to achieve a reasonable

measure of social security for Canadians, that is to compare at all favorably with the security programs being developed by other nations, we must begin to plan our programs more and more on a national basis, and also more and more on a comprehensive rather than on a piecemeal basis. For these reasons and also for reasons of administrative convenience, it seems clear that the federal authority in Canada should be the one responsible for developing full employment policies, adequate minimum wage legislation, (with the provinces having concurrent jurisdiction in case they wish to raise wage levels even higher), family allowances, and the entire network of social insurances. To develop systems of social insurances or of family allowances on a provincial basis would be needlessly complicating and chaotically wasteful, with corresponding disadvantages to the beneficiaries concerned.

These same considerations do not apply, however, with the same force to the next set of social defenses which must be established in Canada to care for those who have fallen through the protective mesh of, *first*, full employment with adequate income from wages and family allowances, and, *second*, insurance protection on a contributory basis against the major hazards outlined above. Here we are dealing with the social services in the narrower but most usually accepted sense of "public charity." For it is well to remember, in the midst of our economic planning, that some classes of our people, cannot be absorbed into any employment market, no matter if it is full to the bursting point. They cannot maintain themselves by wages earned, and the family allowance, if payable, is not sufficient to replace, but only to supplement real wages. The social insurances, likewise, cannot protect this group,—except insofar as it might be possible for the government to pay full premiums for them,—for they themselves cannot contribute from non-existent wages,—and have no employer to contribute his share on their behalf. Then, too, there is that group of persons who have fallen

out of employment as a result of one of the social hazards mentioned above, and who have eventually exhausted their right to insurance benefits, without being able to return to available employment. For all of these, some adequate program based on need must be devised. The services included in this phase of our total program are, in fact, our present day public assistance services which must be extended, broadened, and, at the same time, more humanely and intelligently applied. Work relief for the unemployed (along lines consistent with the maintenance of skills and human dignity), relief at need for unemployables, mothers' allowances, old age pensions (non-contributory), pensions for the blind, medical care for the needy, foster home and specialized care for dependent children, special assistance to the transient, and last but by no means least, an adequate program of farm relief. The elements of all of these programs are to be found at the present time in our Canadian experience. They need to be broadened, developed and applied on a scale that will make them effective cushions of social protection for all the people.

These three broad levels of protection,—(1) full employment on adequate wage levels with family allowances, (2) social insurances fully developed, and (3) public assistance by categories at need, will do much to assure *economic security* to the people of Canada. But, as suggested earlier in this paper, economic security is not synonymous with social security. Freedom from want, the abolition of poverty is not the entire answer. There are environmental and social hazards to guard against, even in the state which can guarantee economic security to all its citizens; and to guard against these distinctive types of hazards, we must provide a network of specialized technical services which do not fall altogether neatly into the categories of economic security measures outlined above. The public health services, for example, with their over-all health units, their preventive programs of child health, their sanitation, public health nursing and nutrition ser-

vices, their services for the control of communicable disease, their specialized efforts in the field of T.B. and V.D. control—their tremendous responsibilities in the field of mental hygiene—all these must find a place in our scheme of social security, because the problems which these programs are designed to attack do not vanish altogether (though they do in part) by solving the problems of economic security. Then, too, we must include those social services which arise out of anti-social behaviour of some of our citizens—child care and protection from neglect, juvenile delinquency, the problem of unmarried parenthood, the problem of adult crime, which requires, despite what we tolerate in Canada, to be handled as a social service problem. True though it may be that a large measure of these problems involving anti-social behaviour find their roots in the inadequacies of our economic system,—the fact still remains that even the abolition of poverty in the broadest sense of the term will never completely remove the need for programs designed to deal with these particular types of social inadequacy and maladjustment, rather than economic insecurity.

There remains for consideration the question of the jurisdiction to which the latter sections of our social security program,—the public assistance services based on need, and the specialized technical social services,—should be assigned. Is the stand to be taken that these programs too, (along with the social insurances, family allowances and broader programs of economic planning aimed at full employment based on adequate wage levels), should be assigned to the federal authority? This is, of course, a possible solution, and one which may attract superficially when one ponders the mass of residence restrictions which provinces are wont to build up around their provisions for social care; but such a drastic proposal would hardly find support from any except those who would abolish entirely the federal system of government in Canada. On the whole, it would seem that, if some solution can be found to the problem of residence restrictions which

deny provincial social service benefits to those who move from one province to another, these public assistance services and the special health and welfare services designed to deal with problems of anti-social behaviour should probably be left administratively with the provinces,—but with Dominion grants in aid and supervision. In particular these services which provide assistance at need are for the most part more subject to legitimate local variation than the other services, and can therefore be locally administered more adequately on the whole than the other services, such as the insurances, where provincial jurisdiction would involve serious administrative difficulties. Work relief programs, however, because of their close connection with full employment and public works policies, should probably be an exception to this general principle, and would consequently become a federal responsibility, as was the Work Projects Administration program in the United States from 1935 to 1942. Relief to the able-bodied unemployed should be kept to the barest minimum as a result of full employment policies, the social insurances, and a federal program of work relief; but where it does become necessary, it should, in the view of the writer, despite the overwhelming mass of opinion to the contrary, be retained within provincial administrative jurisdiction, since the assessment of need in cases of unemployment relief involves essentially the same procedures as are required in connection with the provincial administration of relief to unemployables, of mothers' allowances, of non-contributory old age pensions, and a number of similar services which, presumably, are to remain under provincial jurisdiction.

How, finally, can this dual system of social security,—in part federal, in part

provincial,—be welded together into an organic whole? The answer to the writer of this paper is as simple as it is obvious. We can only attain a well-rounded system of social security in Canada if the federal government, in addition to assuming administrative responsibility for certain sections of the program specifically assigned to it, is prepared also to accept the responsibility of giving leadership, guidance and assistance to the provinces in the development of the provincial services. This can best be done by the development of a sound system of federal conditional grants in aid to the provinces in support of specific provincial services, followed up by adequate technical field service and supervision from the federal authority. One of the conditions of federal aid to the provinces in the public assistance services should of course be either that the province will make available its provincial services to all persons within the province regardless of technical residence qualifications, or, alternatively, that the province will subscribe, along with other provinces, to a set of uniform residence principles and to reciprocal provisions respecting the repatriation of non-residents where necessary, and in other cases the equitable adjustment of accounts as between provinces for assistance given to individuals or families away from their place of accepted residence.

Through such a system of conditional grants in aid, made effective through adequate field service and technical supervision on the federal level, it would be possible to influence constructively the development of provincial services in such a way that they would gear into the services falling under federal jurisdiction and form a strong, organically sound framework of social services for all the Canadian people.