

from Canada, thus increasing our supply of capital and improving our balance of payments position.

I see my time is practically up, but I would simply end by saying that in my view in the private sector there is a strong argument that the employees, through either the representatives in their unions or associations—and I argue this very strongly—must have the legal right to have representation on private pension boards so they can have a say not only in how moneys will be invested and as it is workers' money in the first place and in the main part, but also to have a say in how that money will be redistributed for those individuals who have paid into those pension plans for income security upon retirement.

Hon. Bryce Mackasey (Lincoln): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Beaches (Mr. Young) for not using up all his time, as a matter of fact, in order to allow me ten minutes to speak very briefly on this extremely important subject.

There are certain issues which, for one reason or another, and I think this is one of those issues, that tend to be the pet interest, the main interest of all political parties. I am pleased that virtually all the contributions I have listened to today, without exception, can be considered to be positive. They reflect a concern that somehow the pension system in this country, desirable as it is, is wanting; it is imperfect and improvements are needed.

I am particularly pleased, as a Member of Parliament, one who has been concerned with social policy for a long time, that there will be a National Pensions Conference next week. I am not too sure if all hon. members quite appreciate the significance of this conference, but those of us who were, for one reason or another, closely associated with social policy in the 1960s can tell you that this type of conference was undreamed of and frowned upon less than a decade ago. The thought that private enterprise; that is, the pension industry, would join forces at such a conference with labour groups, with senior citizens, and with government, both provincial and federal, was unthinkable. It is heartening and encouraging that we have reached that point.

Of course, one of the reasons for that co-operation is that we are reflecting public opinion. People are concerned. People want progress made in this particular field. People tend to live longer, homes are smaller, and the many problems of senior citizens are compounded. There is a growing awareness that somehow Canada must do more to make certain our senior citizens can live adequately, if not in luxury.

There is not the same—thank goodness!—tendency, when discussing pensions with senior citizens, to fall back on the old argument one hears in other fields where there is more resistance to helping the less fortunate: "Well, they should have looked after themselves. They should have looked after their old age." But, people do not have control over their jobs, their destiny, their health, war, whatever.

I want to say in the short time I have, because there is not really enough time to do justice to the subject, that to be a

minister of health, one is required to be a certain type of individual. I was very pleased to hear the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) pay tribute to the present Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Begin). Her job is, at best, a vocation; a difficult role in the cabinet. One must plead quite often for help for the people who really do not have a lobby. There is really no such thing as a senior citizen's lobby or a pension lobby on the part of employees, like there is representing every other vestige of Canadian society. Lobbies are legitimate. However, there is really no one organization which comes forward on the Hill periodically to say, "Hey, we want something done about the inadequate pensions of this country." This is the difficult role of the minister. Other ministers around the table can say, "I speak for", or "I represent the views of this lobby", or this group or "the farmers or industry" or "the CMA" or the "chamber", or "labour"; "that is my role." There is nobody who can really stand up in cabinet and say, "My 1.8 million people want some improvement in our pension scheme."

Therefore, we are very fortunate—and I say this in a non-partisan way—to have the present Minister of National Health and Welfare. She has done yeoman service; she has worked very hard—

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Mackasey: —to bring this pensions conference to a head. She, more than any other single member of our government, is responsible for this conference. It was her concept in 1979. It was her realization that if we were going to do justice to this whole complicated subject it required the co-operation, in a conference, of all the groups in society which have a vested interest in pension planning. That includes the pension industry, as well as unions and other organizations.

I was pleased at the contribution of the hon. member for Beaches (Mr. Young), abbreviated as it was, because in this House we speak quite logically and often about senior citizens, war veterans, people over 60, 65, or 70. In this country we have done something to make their lives a little more bearable. Not enough has been said, however, about private pension plans, about the plans to which working people in Canada contribute day in and day out. Nor has enough publicity been given to the points raised by the hon. member for Beaches, such as the tragic circumstances of a worker who may have worked for a company for 20 years or 17 years or 19 years and then finds that company has gone bankrupt. The vested interest of the employer is lost and that person has to start all over to develop some equity in a pension in order to supplement what will be available to him at age 65. We must do something about vesting and about portability.

● (1740)

The challenge at the conference will be really directed to the industry. I do not know of any party which advocates that the government should take over the pension field. I have not heard that proposition put forward in debate by the NDP.