

Old Age Security

minister of national health and welfare to the effect that there are other groups who need consideration, that we should not talk only about those between age 60 and 65. The difficulty is that, while he talked about those other groups which needed to be helped, he never did anything for them. There was introduced last year the social services act which was to be of some help, but it was dropped from the order paper and we see no sign of it in this session.

The new Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) has made noises about a guaranteed income plan. She has talked about the possibility of doing something in three selected categories. One was in respect of persons unemployed between ages 50 and 65. She has also talked about a negative income tax. I am interested in all these things she says, but when previous ministers went through these exercises year after year without doing anything, what hope is there that this minister will get anywhere in this area, especially when she is surrounded by cabinet colleagues whose main task these days seems to be to preach restraint?

I am all for the new minister and her suggestions that we should do something for the unemployed, the single parents and the others who are in need, but at least this move could, and should, be taken right away. We should move the eligible age down to 60. There are many people who do not want to retire at 60 or 65. Some may not want to retire at ages much older than that, but for a great many Canadian workers, especially the kind of workers I have in my constituency, mainly in industry, heavy, dirty, rough and tough, the thing that appeals to them is the possibility of being able to retire at age 60. So I press for that part of my motion.

The other part of my motion calls for an increase in the amount of the pension. I suggest the figure of \$300. It is running a little over \$150 right now. That is the basic pension and, of course, there is the guaranteed income supplement on top of that. That still involves the use of what the government calls, euphemistically, an income test. In my view it is still a means test. If we get a negative income tax we will start to get away from that. The guaranteed income supplement is fine for those who have nothing else, and 30 per cent of our senior citizens are in that position, but it is a very unsatisfactory proposition for many Canadians who are just above the cut-off line. Those are the people who, because they have a little something else, do not qualify for the supplement, yet find it extremely difficult to keep up with today's cost of living.

● (1722)

Please remember, Mr. Speaker, that what we owe to our senior citizens is not just the right to keep up with the cost of living as it was at their point of retirement, but what we owe to them is the right to keep up with the rising standard of living and the rising gross national product. I return to the plea made this afternoon by the President of the Treasury Board, that we do not need to spread gloom and doom but that we have hope for the future of this country. I share in his view, provided we can get rid of the government.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): If we have that hope, and if we believe that our productive capacity is such that we can go on producing greater quantities of goods and services than we now produce, the decision must be made that we are going to share that equally and evenly amongst the various sectors of our population.

As I have said before, I am proud of what Canada has done in the social security field, especially in terms of old age security. I think we have made some tremendous steps. I am proud to have been part of that process over quite a few decades. But that is no excuse for us to stop where we are. We can make things still better for our senior citizens, for those over 65 and for those who want to come in on the program between 60 and 65. That is the reason I present this motion today, and I hope the House will treat it favourably.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, the Good Lord said one day that we must always pray steadfastly. I think that the motion of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) is a practical application of that advice and I am very pleased to support that motion, more especially since I also had the opportunity to present similar motions. Indeed, I consider that Canada is in a position today to meet the needs of senior citizens aged 60 to 65 whose work throughout the years has earned them the gratitude of their country to allow them to live peacefully, enjoying security and freedom.

According to the statistics we have, 896,000 Canadians of both sexes are in the 60-to-65 year age bracket. It is therefore easy for Department of Finance or Treasury Board civil servants to figure out how much it would cost Canada to meet their needs.

We are talking here of voluntary retirement, of course, and I agree with that because many persons who have steady employment and are in good health want to continue working; the motion is not intended to prevent them from doing so, but God knows there are many people who work very hard and barely get by. I know hundreds of them. Representations are often made to me. I had some again over the weekend, and those people are eager to have the right to retire while being assured security. That is totally logical. Studies have been made over the years. The former Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) tabled some on the subject; he often told us that the federal government, through its officials, had discussed the matter with the provincial governments, with their provincial counterparts, with a view to reaching an agreement on how to amend the social acts providing help to the needy. I hope the matter will be studied so that, at long last, a bill can be introduced some time during this Parliament which will meet the needs of those people who are entitled to security and the gratitude of their country.

A serious look at the situation reveals that thousands of young people, young men and women alike, of 18 to 30, are without work. They are qualified, have had good schooling and are capable of serving their country well, but they cannot find