

Suggested Pension Payment Corrections

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I thought that would bring applause from hon. members opposite but the ones sitting there—

An hon. Member: They are ashamed of it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Either they are ashamed or they have forgotten about it. Some of them are so young they would not remember it. It was a great convention, Mr. Speaker. Some people at that convention had some very progressive ideas. Those in attendance included Mackenzie King, W. S. Fielding and Arthur Roebuck. We can have political kibitzing if we want, but that convention was the first at which any national political party in this country made basic proposals for a welfare state in Canada.

An important resolution of that convention with regard to setting up an insurance program against unemployment, sickness and old age became the basis for parliament over the years to build up a social security program for which we can express some gratitude. It is not all it should be but we have done a lot in those 50 years. I say "we"; I do not say the Liberal party because they took an awful lot of prodding. They know that if it had not been for the C.C.F. and the N.D.P. pushing them for the last 30 or 40 years we would not have achieved the things we have accomplished. I now plead with the government: Do not dismantle it all. Do not, in the name of selectivity or in the name of some different kind of expenditure of money, abandon this whole program. Do not be taken in by the silly notion that there has been enough of this free stuff. Those Liberals of 1919 had ideas that still have merit, and Liberals, Conservatives, New Democrats and others have through the years in parliament been both correct and responsible in trying to focus on the rights of our older people and the rights of people in our society generally.

• (3:30 p.m.)

I notice, Mr. Speaker, that you are about to call my attention to the time. May I say that you can relax because I will finish in another 30 seconds.

I plead, therefore, that instead of turning back we go forward to a new approach to retirement based on an absolute recognition of the rights of our older people, based also on pensions of a sufficient amount to enable them to live as they should, and including also the automatic escalation of pensions in line with the increases that take place in wages and salaries and the gross national product, so that our older people will be able

[Mr. Douglas (Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands).]

to enjoy their retirement years in the dignity which is their right.

Hon. J. W. Monteith (Perth): Mr. Speaker, we in this party welcome the opportunity to discuss the problems of our senior citizens. The motion proposed by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) is quite comprehensive. I do not intend to deal with all the elements in it as there will be other speakers from my party. However, in this debate today I wish to put myself and my party squarely on the side of our older citizens.

I feel that the record of the Conservative government between 1957 and 1963, and in fact of our party since that date, bears out my contention that we have always been concerned about the welfare of those no longer in a position to take care of themselves. I believe that what we need is a rational overhaul of our present welfare system.

The present program of social assistance in Canada has grown piecemeal over many years and has been put together by several different administrations. These administrations probably may have had somewhat different goals. It has now developed into a patchwork quilt and, while undoubtedly it has done much to alleviate suffering, too often it fails to cover those most in need. It just does not make sense to have a social assistance program which does not adequately serve those who need help. To my mind there is a case for revision of our welfare concept, and the initiative must come from the federal government. But what has happened, Mr. Speaker?

The government, though preaching the just society during the election campaign, has got itself into a terrible predicament chiefly because of its inability to control inflation and by its inept handling of the country's finances. I suggest that the government by its inability to conduct the financial affairs of Canada in such a way as to contain inflation has further caused great hardship, particularly to our older citizens.

I recall the time the amendment to the Old Age Security Act was passed, having to do with an escalation clause related to the increase in the cost of living. The then Liberal administration tried to imply that it would never allow the increase in the cost of living to be more than 2 per cent per year. What has been the record? We have had a succession of yearly increases of far more than 2 per cent. Who suffers? It is our older citizens, those on old age security and living on fixed