

Social Security

There is another whole area which I most warmly welcome and on which, if I could, I should like to spend more time than I am permitted. That is the idea that social security payments should not be available only to people who do not have anything, those who are unemployed, sick or old, but that there should be supplementation available to those who are sometimes called the working poor, those who are employed but who do not receive enough to meet today's cost of living or to enjoy today's standard of living.

In so far as the minister talked about a new employment strategy and a new income supplementation strategy, he has our wholehearted support. The idea of a guaranteed annual income, the right to live and to enjoy what our society can produce, is something we must establish if we are going to build on a good foundation the kind of social security system we can build. I am completely with the minister in his innovativeness and newness of ideas in this area. Again, he will receive not only our support but our persistent prodding.

I am just about through, Mr. Speaker. I accept the fact that it will take two or three or maybe even four or five years to put all of this into effect. However, that is too long a time for some of our people to endure the poverty they are now suffering. Therefore I urge the minister to do the two things he has promised immediately, namely, to bring in the changes to the Canada Pension Plan and to the Family Allowances Act right away.

I also urge the minister to do something about our senior citizens between the ages of 60 and 65 without further delay. There are several ways this can be done. The minister must not think that because the Old Age Security Act has been amended that this will do for all time. We want a further increase in old age security, and we want pensions at 60 years of age.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but I have to remind hon. members that, although this is a very important matter and we have had a very lengthy statement from the minister and very lengthy comments from hon. members, the rule is still there that comments made by members on behalf of the opposition parties ought to be brief. The remarks of the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre and the hon. member for Hillsborough were so interesting that they appeared to be brief to some hon. members, but it is still my duty to remind hon. members of the Standing Order.

Mr. Baldwin: Stanley's speech from the throne.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I accept the suggestion that I should be brief, Mr. Speaker, but if Your Honour thinks that my remarks are that interesting, maybe I could extend them even more.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I am just about at the end of my statement, Mr. Speaker. I started to say that we want action soon on family allowances and on the Canada Pension Plan. We want further improvement with regard to our senior citizens, both a lowering of eligible

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

age and a higher pension. We also think there should be early action for the blind and the disabled. It is a disgrace the way these people have had to wait. If these things are done soon, the minister will have won the reputation which he has already begun to establish as a man who means business. In conclusion, I simply say, even though this comes under another minister, that we also want action soon on the basic rate of the war disability pension.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[Translation]

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wish to thank the minister for sending us, at the beginning of the sitting, copy of his statement. I wish all the other ministers would adopt that practice.

Mr. Speaker, the statement of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) is most agreeable to our party because it deals, among other things, with the national income and the security of the citizens. If our party has shown concern in this House for any subject in the last few years, it certainly has been for social security.

That is why I should like to have as much time as the spokesmen for the other parties to make remarks on that extremely important statement. Indeed, it does not happen very often that we are in agreement with the government on the principles it sets forth before the House.

Mr. Speaker, before going into the technical aspects of the measures announced today by the minister, I should like to point out that today's statement would not have been made by this government had it had a majority. That is real proof that a minority government is much closer to the people, that it has to give more consideration to the will of the people, and that it cannot depend solely on a majority to impose its views upon the citizens.

Mr. Speaker, on page 2 of his statement, the minister says, and I quote:

... a more effective and better coordinated system of social security...

I agree with the minister, but we would have preferred that more orderly system of social security to have been implemented before today.

As a matter of fact, the minister's statement tells us nearly nothing, because what it is promoting is exactly what we have been advocating in our program during the last election campaign. Indeed we have said this: Social Credit will replace the present government programs on social welfare by programs on social and economic security.

Although the figures tabled in the House today by the minister are far from representing the social security requirements in Canada, they nevertheless represent in my view an important step by the government towards the establishment of a program of guaranteed annual income. In fact, we were the only party to include in our platform during the last election campaign a system of guaranteed annual income.

● (1450)

I also see that during the weekend in Montreal the official opposition party was urged to pass a resolution on