

The Address—Mr. Savard

Canadian flag is displayed in the centre of the flag, overlooking the fort . . . as if to suggest that a common ideal must supersede ethnic loyalties. Verdun has a past; it is said that happy people have no history. In fact, Verdun has lived in peace and has only a short unruffled domestic history.

Mr. Speaker, the present city of Verdun is located on a narrow strip between the St. Lawrence River and the canal of the Montreal Aqueduct which was built only in 1852. Nowadays, Verdun is densely populated even though municipal bylaws place a ban on buildings higher than three stories. Nun's Island has been recently allowed to build high-rise apartment buildings. While pursuing its peaceful development, Verdun has had a history which is not without interest. It might be compared to an honest middle-class housewife more interested in comfort and even inconspicuous luxury than money making pursuits.

Although hemmed in, it enjoys almost all urban amenities without their many inconveniences. Over its 100 years of existence, Verdun has managed to offer the possibly unique example of a town with a population of 200 that has expanded into a city of over 80,000. The average age of Verdun residents is about 35 years, which means I represent a large number of senior citizens, and as such I am pleased to support one of the proposals contained in the Speech from the Throne which provides people least able to fend for themselves with a better protection against inflation. It is essential to give all senior citizens living conditions consistent with their dignity and their integrity as human beings and help them retain as much as possible their personal independence physically, mentally and socially.

There is an old saying that you can judge the degree of civilization of a nation by the way it treats its elders. There are more senior citizens today than ever before and they live longer than in the past but without receiving the care or assistance from younger generations that was accorded to them in primitive societies. We live in a context where old is overlooked and youth is at a premium. This represents a problem as the number of elderly people is growing. Their authority becomes weaker, their role within the family and society is reduced, not to mention uncertainty of their economic situation, their loneliness, the inadequacy of the care which their physical condition may require. The role given by modern society to the aged is not to play any role at all.

● (1612)

When you ask people what they think about the elderly, very often they will give you these answers: tiredness, loneliness, misery, sickness, sadness and death. The aspiration of older people is continuity, that is expectation of such things as they are familiar with or any foreseen change that they will decide for themselves, if possible. Continuity in life is expressed by the location where you live, employment, family church, social circles, hobbies, personal care. Without that

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desire for continuity, the aged ask that society allow them to retain from life the picture they had of it in their youth. As every human being reflects his past, he claims the right to keep during his last years what he was and what he knew of the past.

Mr. Speaker, what strikes me very much is the sudden feelings of aging. All of a sudden, at 65, people grow old as if in an instant, after a ruthless rupture, they leave adulthood and become elderly. To sum it up, all ages are not a part of life. Attitudes toward old age almost suggest that old age is for other people only. One thing we should remember is that we will get old as we have lived, we are potentially elderly. Man loses his humanity when he expects structures to be more merciful than he is. Let us appropriate funds to invest into people rather than concrete, and we will thereby provide benefits for the elderly that are chronically ill.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Minister for National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin) for caring so much about the elderly. She recently announced a Bureau for the Golden Age, so that their voice could be heard. Every member in this House should look up to her as a symbol of determination and moral strength. Such an initiative will lead to more than one revolution, a fiscal revolution and a redistribution of public funds now involving \$4.5 billion for old age security pensions, guaranteed income supplement and spouse benefits alone.

When we speak of the elderly, the phrase is "they" or "them", but in a few years out it will be "we" or "us". "We are always old to somebody else." The only thing that makes man grow old is his body, which constitutes an important medical problem, but it must be seen in a context which would recognize first of all that, like anyone else, an older person needs dignity, fulfilment, comfort, appreciation and most of all to be useful in one's own way according to one's own condition. Nevertheless it often happens that the older a person gets, the fewer friends he has because many of those he liked have died. To encourage older people to stay active and committed, the federal government has launched a program called "New Horizons" which grants money to older people who wish to develop new projects. New Horizons pays for facilities and equipment but does not offer a salary to older people. When this program was launched in 1972, the then minister of national health and welfare, the hon. John C. Munro, declared that he believed that participation in a mutual aid activity and others could suppress the obstacles which bring social isolation and a feeling of solitude among Canadians over 65.

More than half the projects subsidized by New Horizons deal with leisure centres for the aged. If those projects for which funds have been granted reflect the preoccupations of people who frequent these centres for the aged, which is probable, one reaches the conclusion that older men and women are mainly interested in sports and games, then in craftsmanship, leisure and cultural activities. The two main