

Board that we do not need to spread gloom and doom and to say the future is hopeless—is to provide the best possible retirement for our senior citizens.

This is why I invite the House today to indicate its support for the two main proposals which are in my motion: first, that the eligible pension age should be lowered, certainly for those who are out of the labour market; second, that the amount payable as old age security should be increased. I am prepared to admit, Mr. Speaker—in fact, I am prepared to go further than that and to assert—that the life of senior Canadians today is a lot better, a lot more civilized, than it was when some of us first came to this parliament—certainly a lot better than it was in the days of my predecessor as hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, the late J. S. Woodsworth.

But when one speaks of the kinds of pensions which were paid in the 1920s, the 1930s and right into the 1940s, and compares them with pensions and other benefits that are available for our senior citizens today, there is no argument: we have made tremendous improvements, and parliament is to be congratulated for that. I think we have the right to say that our movement has been worth everything, even if we had done nothing else than to provoke parliament into passing good legislation for our senior citizens. The proper thing to do is not to compare what is available today with what was available 40 or 50 years ago. The proper thing to do is to ask whether our senior citizens are getting their fair and proper share of the wealth the country is now producing.

● (1712)

I spoke on this matter during the debate on the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, I believe on October 25, and I pointed out then a statistic I think is relevant, that the gross national product of Canada today is a little over \$200 billion. The President of the Treasury Board gave a per capita figure today which confirms that figure of over \$200 billion. According to the statistics that are readily available, out of the federal treasury, about \$5 billion is today being paid for benefits to our senior citizens.

I would estimate, and I think about all one can do in this area is some guessing, looking and trying to figure it all out, that probably our senior citizens, persons 65 years of age and over, receive from other sources, such as provincial treasuries, private pension plans, and so on, something of the order of another \$3 billion. I make it clear that this is a guess, but I believe it is an informed one. I think I can say without being proved wrong too far one way or the other, that our Canadians 65 years of age and over are living on a total income of about \$8 billion. In my view, the comparison that has to be made is not with what other things cost the federal treasury, but between what our senior citizens are getting, and what is being produced by the population as a whole. The amount of \$8 billion is one twenty-fifth of the \$200 billion we are now producing, but our senior citizens, about 2 million, represent about one-twelfth of the population. I suggest that is a relevant and important statistic. About one-twelfth of our people are getting about one twenty-fifth of the wealth that is produced.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

If you want to put this comparison in percentages rather than in fractions, you arrive at a comparable statement that 8 per cent of our people are getting only 4 per cent of the wealth we are producing.

I contend that there should be increases in pensions even at a time when the government is shouting for restraint, and I say shouting for it but not necessarily practising it in other areas. I am merely asking for what is fair, and if in a country like Canada we cannot be fair, especially to our older people, we do not deserve to be regarded as a civilized society. I press very strongly, in spite of all one can say, and I could say it as well as anyone else, that in view of the progress we have made in the last 40 or 50 years, compared with what we are able to produce in Canada today we are not giving our senior citizens a fair share.

I am not standing here suggesting there should be absolute equality or that retired people should have the same amount of wealth as those working, raising families, and so on—we are talking about this in comparative terms—but certainly the differences should not be as great as they are. We should not have 8 per cent of our people receiving only 4 per cent of the gross national product. I would emphasize that it is these people who helped bring the country to where it is today in terms of its capacity and in terms of its ability to produce, and I say we should be doing a lot better for them.

I express this desire that something better should be done for our older people in two main ways. On the one hand, as my motion indicates, we should be lowering the eligible age, certainly for those who are out of or are prepared to leave the labour market. In other words, I think both old age security and Canada Pension Plan retirement benefits should be available at age 60. Please note that I use the word "available". I am not suggesting that they be paid universally or automatically as they are now at age 65. I am suggesting that between ages 60 and 65 those who are out of the labour market, or are prepared to leave the labour market, should be entitled to draw the full old age security and the full Canada Pension Plan benefits they have earned. I will not take the time now to compare what we are doing with spouses' allowances, which is a grossly unfair way of providing pensions to some persons in that age bracket; I simply emphasize the fact that this would be a much more fair way of doing it.

Let me also argue, as other members have from time to time, if we did that, gave a large number of people between 60 and 65 the opportunity to retire, this would open jobs which are sorely needed by the younger people in the population. I am aware of the arguments we hear these days about the right to keep on working. We heard them in respect of a motion last week. I do not mind that, but I also want our senior citizens to have the right to retire, and there is not much use talking about the right to retire if you have to retire on nothing. Accordingly, I urge that consideration be given to lowering the eligible age under those two main pieces of legislation for those who are out of the labour market.

I could mention again some of the things that are said in response to this. We heard many statements by the former