

### Old Age Security

I wish I were, because I know that the people in the elder group in our society today are having a very, very hard time. In earlier civilizations, to be old was to be honoured, perhaps to be revered, and the expression "the elders among us" was an accolade. Now the older citizen is apt to be thrust aside because we live in an age where one has to be new, modern, or young, or pretend to be one of those. Perhaps the virtues and values which a long life gives are improperly regarded and insufficiently valued. And so, to the economic problems of the old comes the social problem, and at times indeed perhaps it is a spiritual problem.

I am troubled and others have mentioned this—that those in the old age pension sector are regarded as pariahs in political fighting. That was certainly the case, Mr. Speaker, and there is a little of that yet. But I think there is less of it because of the government which was led by the right hon. member for Prince Albert (Mr. Diefenbaker).

There was a very clever sort of campaign for years that unless you were a supporter of the party of Mackenzie King, you were somehow likely to be opposed not only to old people but to welfare generally. I can well recall campaigning in 1956 for the election of 1957—I knew I needed a head start—and a dear old lady saying to my colleague, now the hon. member for Malpeque (Mr. MacLean), and to myself—there was nothing senile about the lady, but she was very concerned—"They tell me that if you people get in we will lose our pensions." I thought how base, how terrible for someone to try to indurate that poor soul with the evil consequences of a Conservative victory.

That is why I have always been proud of the fact that the right hon. gentleman from Prince Albert laid at rest those Kingian suggestions and post-Kingian suggestions that the party of Macdonald and the party of Borden had any lack of concern for the social welfare of Canadians, old and young. So I think it is less an issue today than it was, and I think that that is an improvement.

Thoughtful students of gerontology and the care of the aged are concerned today that our society is not doing enough to find useful activity for older people. I do not want to quote New Jersey, Princeton, or even Calgary, but careful, thoughtful studies in this area reveal a tremendous area of useful activity for people who, according to our public service regulations and according to the personnel requirements of the private sector, are too old, are on the shelf. It is well known that useful, creative activity is of tremendous value in enriching the life, physical and spiritual, of older people and indeed perhaps in prolonging it; and the prolongation of useful life is surely a cherished goal of our society.

But if we have a system whereby the useful activity and the creativity of the elderly person puts him in the situation where his earnings are diminished, then you are back to where you started when the means test was abolished, because the big argument for the abolition of the means test was that it discouraged savings, the frugal habits of life. Now, again, when I use those expressions I show myself as someone who is very old or who reads

transfer to a Crown corporation. How much studying do we need?

Today hon. members have discussed, and could not help but discuss in respect of a bill of this kind, the question of poverty. We have had wars on poverty, committees on poverty, studies on poverty and hearings on poverty. We are investigating it, we are fighting it, we are trying to measure it, and the poverty line seems to be moving. There are differences of opinion concerning who is poor, but there is a profound feeling that there are far too many poor people today. If I heard the Minister of Finance (Mr. Benson) correctly last night, 10 per cent of the people are in the rich category and the rich category starts at \$10,000 a year. So the poverty line is a mighty big net which draws in a great many Canadians. Whatever the statistical precision of this day on the poverty line's location, there are far too many people below it.

• (3:10 p.m.)

It is a terrible thing that this country that we talk about as proud, as glorious and as free, this country that Laurier said would have the twentieth century in its hands, should be a country in which there is so much unemployment, so much poverty, so much drag upon economic growth and so much dissatisfaction from people who look to the state for a return for their efforts on behalf of the state.

On this quiet, thoughtful, friendly afternoon it is not my intention to say everything I would like to say, or indeed to take all my time. I would like to be generous and give a few minutes to the other fellows. But I am troubled by many things in this measure—not just the amount. I think a lot about this whole question of the means test, if that is not too archaic a word. I am just old enough, at 51, to remember some of the pitiful, painful degradation through which Canadians passed as, in an earlier day, they tried to qualify for the mere pittance of old age pensions, as they were then called, which were doled out by penurious and callous governments of all sorts.

The hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) spoke about people cheating. I am too gentle a man to use that word, but certainly people did present themselves in lights which were probably not quite accurate, and many people turned over property to others. They thought it was a gesture, so that they could prove to the state that they were impoverished. And the poor devils discovered the only reality perhaps in the whole wretched business was the divesting by themselves of their little bit of property. So, Mr. Speaker, I have a built-in concern about the means test. I think it is an iniquitous thing which has blighted people. It made people do things before the emanations of the state that citizens should not be called upon to do.

Perhaps we have reached an age of sophistication where just because we have changed the name—we do not use means test any more; we talk about negative income tax and the needs test—we have reached the stage where we can obviate the necessity for these degrading procedures. But I am not yet convinced of that.