

Old Age Security

In taking a look at old age pension legislation and the manner in which we treat the elderly people of this country, I think we must bear in mind the changes that are taking place in society. Basic changes have been made, and changes are continuing to be made, in the structure of the family, indeed in the entire structure of society. No longer is it the case that the grandfather and the grandmother live with some member of the family; very often they live on their own, and for many reasons. They try to maintain an independent existence.

This is one of the facts of society today. Since forces in present day society have brought about this changed approach to life, we must ensure that our institutions and policies are geared to taking account of the situation and the problems that inevitably arise. Basically we must keep faith with the elderly people of this country. As I have already indicated, we must become concerned with the process of alienation that affects so much of our society and is causing much of the malaise that exists today.

It has often been said that a society is judged on the basis of the way it treats its young, its sick and its aged. I suggest that as far as the latter group of people is concerned, the people of Canada will not judge the government well in terms of the policies it is introducing on their behalf.

I know that many government members contend that we cannot afford to pay more money. They ask where we are going to get the required amount of money from. This is what we have been hearing, of course, over the years when discussing every progressive welfare measure that has been proposed in Canada. I say that we cannot afford not to introduce a better measure for the aged people of Canada. I say that an obligation exists in this regard, and that we must ensure the future welfare of the old people of this country and of Canadian society. This is why the government should reconsider the measure before the House and should ensure that all of our elderly people are treated fairly and squarely.

[Translation]

Mr. Charles-Eugène Dionne (Kamouraska): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-202 which is before the House provides certain amendments to the present Old Age Security Act.

Unfortunately, it also contains certain provisions which are not likely to clarify the matter of eligibility. In fact, there is bound to be mistakes in interpretation followed by much correspondence to clarify the situation in certain particular cases.

The adjustment to the supplement, although small, will be appreciated. However, I am of the opinion that the government should have taken into account various factors which at times cause inconveniences to older people.

In the paper *La Presse* of Saturday, May 9, 1970, there was an article claiming that the role and place of older people has yet to be determined, and I quote:

For the state and for industry, one becomes old at 65. At that age, one no longer has the right to work, one is no longer considered productive. One is only entitled to a bare minimum, like widows and crippled children.

[Mr. Burton.]

The heart specialist, Dr. Paul David, recently asked: Why live longer, if one cannot lead a useful life? On the other hand, a gerontologist with the Jewish General Hospital, who also works in two veterans' hospitals in the Montreal area, disagrees that productivity should be used as a criterium in judging man. An old man could be happy even without being useful, according to this doctor, if he is still loved and if he still has dealings with other people.

Harvest Years, an American magazine for retired people, has this to say about the needs of the old: to be in good health and to have as much independence as possible; to have enough economic security to ensure food, shelter, clothing, medical care and leisure; to be assured of a role in life, of a place in society, to continue to share, helps, love, talk and make plans; to keep one's self-respect, knowing that one is useful, productive and active, within certain limits.

Here are two opinions out of three which lean towards usefulness. Is it easier to find some usefulness for old people or to accept for them (and to have them accept it) a reference role?

A real pension plan should be devised so as to enable old people to use this maturity at an important stage of their life in order to put in practice a life philosophy that it is impossible to have at an earlier age.

If reduced physical strength or the departure of their friends have closed certain doors to them, their maturity opens others. Their share of disappointment in life has increased their cautiousness and this enables them to avoid trouble. Whatever privileges the pensioner has to give up, he still keeps the right to usefulness and dignity.

Everybody cannot find enjoyment from the same sources. Each must try and discover his own capabilities and seek enjoyment according to his own limits, being always very careful not to ask nor hope for what is impossible. Society does not do all its duty if it provides only for the physical well-being of pensioners without any regard for their emotional and psychological needs. It is a mistake to believe that we can, so to speak, put them out to pasture by providing them with food, clothing and shelter.

Canada must endeavour to make the most of the enormous supply of ideas, talents and skills which are represented by its one and a half million people over 65.

During all their active life, these persons have used knowledge inherited from their predecessors, and now, as they are about to retire, they are able to carry out their obligations and to pass it on to their successors.

When we examine a little more closely the fate of the retired people, we soon notice that much has still to be done in order to create that just society which has been promised and which the people want.

It is found that most needy pensioners continue to suffer severe hardship besides living in constant insecurity. It is sometimes ridiculous to hear people speak of guaranteed income. They would be better advised if they tried to palliate the disastrous effects of the present system, which I would call the "guaranteed tax system".

Insufficient consideration is given to fluctuations of monetary values, so that the continuous rise in the cost of living within the system now in force confronts pensioners with serious financial problems, in addition to difficulties arising from application of regulations cover-