

Expansion of Social Security

the government indicates it considers as priorities, will fill many of the gaps in our social security system.

There are other areas that should be taken into account in such a review. There is our hospital legislation, and our veterans allowance legislation is currently under review. In that respect I suggest that we in the Liberal party cannot relax our efforts in furthering social welfare legislation. We do not deny that we need the help and assistance of those in other parties in this house who have advocated these measures for so long, but it would be a mistake to think that the true and sole concern for many of these people rests in any one group. I think this party has indicated its sincere concern for these people, and the government has a record of showing this concern. It has proved its concern, as the legislative records of this country will show.

There is one other area of activity with which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre will, I am sure, be familiar. I refer to the various welfare conferences which have been held under the direction of my hon. friend and colleague the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss LaMarsh) since this government took office. All the deputy ministers of welfare met here in Ottawa on February 14 and 15 and the meeting reconvened on May 28 and 29. Many proposals for an extensive review of our social security programs were considered at these meetings. These proposals are now receiving intensive study not only by the federal government but at provincial level. These arrangements are, of course, based on the acknowledgement that the provincial governments have extensive jurisdiction in this field and must be consulted. Thus, to say that we are slow in moving in this area is a harsh judgment indeed. We all know that in dealing with problems which go to the heart of the federal-provincial relationship, a number of meetings must be held before agreement can be established. One is dealing with various points of view which must, inevitably, be expressed by representatives of ten different provinces, and these things just cannot be done overnight. I think we can all be thoroughly satisfied, in the light of the conferences which have been held to date, that a sincere effort has been made to arrive at a consensus expressed by all the provinces, which consensus is necessary before proceeding with a review of our social security arrangements so as to fill some of the gaps

[Mr. Munro.]

to which the hon. member has called our attention.

I will not continue any further. I would simply place on record, again, the fact that this government is carrying on the very activities which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre is recommending in his resolution.

[Translation]

Mr. L. J. Pigeon (Joliette-L'Assomption-Montréal): Mr. Speaker, the remarks of the parliamentary secretary were not too encouraging. In my opinion, they were lacking in precision. The resolution introduced by the hon. member on my left is very important.

We would have liked to know from the government at what time the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) will announce to the house the convening of a federal-provincial conference to consider as soon as possible which steps should be taken for a complete overhaul of our social security program in order that part of the medical costs be paid jointly by the governments and that the latter increase the pension paid to widows with dependent children.

What is it waiting for to grant a pension to citizens 60 years of age? We would have liked the representative of the Minister of the National Health and Welfare to tell us what exactly the government proposes to do. It is very fine to speak of former action taken by the various governments in power, but it does not fill the present gaps in the social security field.

Mr. Speaker, Canada is, with the United States, one of the countries with the highest standard of living. We have the means and revenue to fill those gaps and rectify the unfair deal to the widows and people of 60 or more, who are not getting any pension now. The government spends fabulous sums for maintaining a Canadian force in Cyprus—and I am not against it—but, if we have the means to meet the whole cost of maintaining our troops in Cyprus, without its being defrayed by the United Nations as a whole, we also have enough revenue to pay those medical expenses.

I wonder why the government does not, as soon as possible, introduce some legislation providing at least a pension for the people of 60 and over. At this time, with automation, with our young people who have a trade, everybody knows that it is impossible for any Canadian citizen to find work after the age of 45. We have, in our statutes, no legislation to force private enterprise to give