

Mr. MacINNIS: Why maintain it?

Mr. ROEBUCK: I am not advocating the maintaining of it. Do not take that meaning out of my words. I say that even if you do maintain the exploitation and waste in future years, as I hope we shall not, we could still double the income of every working man in this country. So that the time for saying we have not the wherewithal to deal with the necessary calls upon our purse has gone by. When the war needs and the fear that war engenders has passed, Canada should be able to build a secure and prosperous and healthy people. I mention these matters referred to in the speech of the hon. member for New Westminster because they are along the lines of the remarks I had planned to make.

Many tempting topics present themselves to a speaker in the debate on the address in reply, but I propose to confine myself to just one, and thus I may lend greater emphasis to the cause I propose to plead. I wish to bring as forcefully as I can before the people of Canada, if my voice carries that far, before the members of this chamber and the members of the administration, the matter to which I intend to refer.

I ask hon. members to throw their minds back, not very long in the memory of man, and recall the days when the soldiers of Canada marched away to world war No. 1. They donned the king's uniform and left this country to engage in the horrors of trench warfare. When they were going, from thousands of platforms, from the floor of this house and from the mouths of the responsible statesmen of that day they were assured that under no circumstances would their dependents suffer want. The men who made those speeches believed in what they said. They had a right to believe in what they said, because I have no doubt they had every confidence that that would be the wish of the people who would succeed them. I do not mean necessarily the government; I mean the people of Canada who would come after them. They felt that it would be the desire and the determination of all men that under no circumstances would any of the dependents of those bold young men of that day be left in want.

A little more than twenty-five years has gone by since those fateful days when the young men of Canada marched to war. To-day several thousands—I do not know how many; it is impossible to know—of aged widows of the men who were then youths are in dire poverty, living upon charity, or dependent upon relief. The humble pleas of these poor, poverty-stricken in many instances, and old women—I do not think they will take offence at my calling them old, since most of them

are far beyond middle age—have been presented to this house on numerous occasions, but seemingly they have fallen upon deaf ears. No, not deaf ears, that is wrong; they have been heard with sympathy, but for some reason nothing has been done. I hold in my hand a petition which was circulated among some of the members at the last session of parliament, and in substance it says this:

That the soldiers of the last great war were assured that their dependents would not be left in want; that many widows of deceased veterans of the last great war are now living in poverty, are dependent on charity, or are in receipt of municipal relief; therefore your petitioners pray that all widows of deceased veterans of the great war of 1914-18 who are now in necessitous circumstances be pensioned in an amount sufficient to provide the reasonable necessities of life.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): May I interrupt my hon. friend?

Mr. ROEBUCK: I have a good deal more to say.

Mr. MACKENZIE (Vancouver Centre): If the hon. member is referring to the delegation of non-pensioned widows that came here last year to interview the committee, and which was sponsored by himself and the hon. member for Davenport (Mr. MacNicol), I may tell him that provision is being made in the estimates this year to meet some of the considerations then advanced.

Mr. ROEBUCK: I am sorry I objected to the interruption. The news, Mr. Speaker, is splendid news. I hope that the measure which the minister has announced will be a whole-souled and sweeping measure. I suppose I can hardly hope that it will be as sweeping as I should like, but I do know the kindly spirit and the sympathetic nature of the Minister of Pensions and National Health (Mr. Mackenzie). The hon. member for Westminster had occasion to compliment the minister no less than three times during the course of his speech, and in each of those compliments I join, because the minister has accomplished something in an outstanding way since he assumed the most important office of the ministry of pensions and health.

I should like to say something further on this question, notwithstanding what the hon. member has said, in order that I may urge the fullest consideration for the cause I am now pleading. I know that the words the minister has just uttered, brief but much to the point, will bring a measure of relief to many a poor old woman in many a humble home across Canada. They will be accepted with gratitude and relief, almost with exulta-