

*Social and Economic Security*

conomic equality. Let us move in that direction, not backward as so many want to do.

I submit that the minister, because he is well versed in this, is aware that the programs under government jurisdiction that do the most for the morale and the spirit of our people are the universal programs. Old age security does it. Granted, the minister has spoiled it a bit by the income test he has attached to a portion of it, but the basic \$80 is still there as a universal right that is earned simply by age and residence; and compared with what the old, means test pension did to the souls of older people, that pension is a godsend, not only in terms of dollars but in terms of what it does for their morale.

The same thing is true of the Canada Pension Plan. It has not been around very many years yet but it is having its effect, not only on those retired who are drawing the small pensions already available but widows and those suffering illness or accident get the benefits of the Canada Pension Plan, and they get those benefits as of right. They paid for them with the contributions they made.

The same is true of unemployment insurance and family allowances. For all of the light criticism that there is about family allowances because some people get them who may not need them, the fact is that that payment has meant a great deal to millions of parents, mothers in particular, and I say it has been a good program across the years—good mainly because it was a program based on a universal right.

**Mr. Munro:** May I ask the hon. member a question?

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** Certainly.

**Mr. Munro:** If the hon. member is advocating emphasis in terms of universal payments and, getting away from the selective income test approach that he has identified, that we take in some of our programs, I would ask him if we are to guarantee income floors—and for the sake of this particular argument we will take the poverty levels spoken of by the Economic Council—and if we are to guarantee income floors to everyone in Canada, and here I am talking about young married couples and couples with children—I am not talking about just those people who are out of the work force—would he make payments of this nature to everyone in Canada?

Let us say that here we are talking about roughly \$4,000 for a man with a wife and two children. Would he pay that \$4,000 to virtually everyone in Canada and somehow recover it back through the tax system? Is that the way he would approach an income floor?

**Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):** That is precisely the direction in which I think we ought to move, and I think that is precisely the direction we shall move, given time. I think the minister should take the first steps in that direction now, instead of taking the reverse steps that I believe he is taking despite the enunciation of the good principles and intentions that we heard from him tonight, just as we have heard from him on other occasions.

The minister talked about what we are going to do for the working poor. For heaven's sake, let us stop using that language. When we use that language and treat them accordingly, we are condemning them to be working poor for the rest of their lives—and that goes for their children

and their children's children. We have to move in the direction of equality in our society that will establish the kind of floor the minister has mentioned, or perhaps even a higher floor, and this as a matter of right to all Canadians.

I have heard the question asked today and previously: Who will pay for the cost? What will we tax the upper and middle income people in order to do this? That is a problem. I know that very well, but I submit that is nothing compared with the cost we are imposing on 25 per cent of our people by keeping them in poverty, the human cost, the cost in morale, and the cost in spirit. If we believe Canada is the kind of country where human beings count, we ought to see this as a top priority, getting our income so distributed that we do something for the souls and the morale of our people. And we do not do that the Croll way or by the backward steps the minister has taken, steps which I think are contrary to the views he holds.

The minister looked at me a few minutes ago when he talked about some of the help that the government got from this side of the House with a certain program a few years back. During that time I got to know the minister well. It was before he became minister—and I think he agrees with me on this. I urge him, from his place in the cabinet, to say "No" every time he can to any of these retrogressive steps, and to say "Yes" to forward steps in terms of universal programs and demogrants.

Instead of saying that we cannot do it because we cannot immediately pay \$4,000 to every family in Canada, I say let us start with certain defined groups. I still think we can improve the pensions we pay to our older people, but I must not spend too much time on that subject because whenever I get started on it the first thing I know is that my allotted time is up. However, I still think there should be a substantial increase in that basic \$80 a month.

I think the time has come to provide for pensions at age 60. I have said this a number of times and the government will hear from me many times until we get it. I advocate pensions at 60, both old age security pensions and Canada Pension Plan benefits, on a voluntary basis, in other words for those who are prepared to leave the labour market. I would not make any other restrictions so far as drawing these two pensions are concerned, but I do say that people who leave the labour market should get these two pensions at age 60.

• (9:10 p.m.)

I believe that the federal government should have quite a bit to say about its action in providing superannuation for civil servants at age 55 after they have 30 years' service. This sort of lead should be given to industry and society generally. A pension after 30 years of service to an employer, public or private, is fully justified, and it is time such a practice became general. These steps also have the effect of creating employment for those who are younger, but I shall not get off into that tonight as I want to make precise suggestions of what I think the government should pursue. One is in the area of the old age security, increasing the amount which is now \$80 to a higher figure and making it possible to pay both old age security and the Canada Pension Plan benefit at age 60.

Another area in which the government should move ahead on the kind of basis I am advocating is with respect