

The Address—Mr. J. Epp

the Hon. Member demonstrated was for granting it to those more in need than to those who do not need it nearly as badly.

That is the gist of the debate. That is what I was trying to put forward to the Hon. Member and to Canadians. Surely it is within our imagination that, having those resources and having those considerations, we can only benefit the family by strengthening the family position by looking at the program at the present time, taking a look at if it were to be changed, which families would benefit and which income group would benefit most. That is the kind of debate and review to which we look forward. I also look forward to receiving the Hon. Member's input.

With regard to the reference she made respecting a Manitoban, Mr. Knowles, who is sitting at the table today, all of us from Manitoba take pride in the contribution that he has made to public life.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Epp (Provencher): We have had pension reform discussions for 10 years now. I hope that during this Parliament we can move the discussion to the point of the practical. As I said earlier, we have built our benefit system step by step, I think carefully, trying to respond to need.

● (1640)

We can see what we have not done by taking a look at the task force report on pension reform. What we must do is to give either more incentives, more encouragement or a combination of the two so that Canadians will invest more of their own resources for their retirement period. Surely that is a responsible step for this Parliament to take today for the future of Canada.

When looking at the demographics of the group of Canadians who are over 65 today and looking at the possible numbers of Canadians who will be over the age of 65 by the turn of the century, a time when some of us might be approaching that age ourselves, it is important for us to note that the numbers will grow dramatically, and obviously with that the dependency factor grows. We must address that today. We cannot wait to address it 10 years from now when we suddenly have a situation on our hands which is hard to handle. Let us do it today. That is why we are putting these considerations quite openly on the table. Let us have that review. Once having had that review, which I do not think need be all that long, let us close the books and get on with the best social policy we can put together.

Mr. Waddell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to comment on two issues and put a question to the Minister. I have heard two western Ministers speak on oil and energy. If those Ministers would take a close look at what was said in the Throne Speech and the economic statement, they would see that they did not give the oil industry anything except for a change in the threshold of the PGRT from \$250,000 to \$500,000. Basically, however, they really did not give the industry much of anything.

Perhaps it takes a member of the New Democratic party to say this, but it is interesting to note that no one has picked up on the fact that the Government has not really got off the backs of the industry. It has made some promises for the future about world prices but it did not give the industry anything. It just took more taxes from the consumers. I simply want to make that point after having heard these Ministers say how great the Government will be for the oil industry in the West.

I would like to ask a question of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Epp). A man who was 62 years of age came to my office last Saturday. He was a real estate agent until he went blind in one eye. He is now going blind in the other. He has to go to the food bank in Vancouver along with a great many other people because he does not receive enough money. I would like to ask the Minister if there is a food bank in the City of Winnipeg. Where does the Minister stand on the question of food banks? Does he believe that Canada should continue to have food banks? I ask this seriously. Is that the kind of private sector welfare that the Minister believes we need, or does the Minister believe we should do away with food banks and replace them with adequate pensions from the Government?

Mr. Epp (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, it almost goes without saying that my responsibility, which I am sure is shared by everyone in the House, is to see that we have an economic climate in which people will receive pensions which will allow them to live in dignity. I really do not know why that must be re-stated. I would think that that was a given, to me at least, it is a given.

If I could draw from my background just a bit, I would say something else to the Hon. Member. I do not think we serve people by placing every reliance on the state. Let me be practical. I am not defending poverty, but some of the best service that has been given to those who are less fortunate than you and I, Mr. Speaker, has been given by voluntary organizations, churches, service clubs and ordinary Canadians who have used those vehicles to help their fellow man. I do not discourage that; I laud it. That does not take away any of our responsibilities as public people for improving the public pension system.

Let us not deprecate the work of ordinary Canadians. Although I am a Minister of the Crown, I do not believe that the state does a better job than the individual. The state changes; the individual can show compassion. Individuals show love to others; the state sets up programs. While I accept that the two must be meshed, let us not ever work under the assumption that one can work without the other. When looking at social policy, let us never forget that compassionate component in society, because the state can never replace it totally.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Charest): Order. I call on the Hon. Member for Mount Royal (Mrs. Finestone) to make her speech.

Mrs. Finestone: Is the Hon. Minister finished?