

agricultural products in the markets of the world—Denmark, Australia and the Argentine—the British pound has been worth \$6, \$6.10 and even up to \$7. These countries have thus been able to undersell us and take from us our markets in oriental countries.

Now we come to the reform measures which have been brought down at this session. Such reforms as the unemployment insurance bill, the forty-eight hour week, the weekly day of rest, the minimum wage, are all right in themselves but they are of no immediate help to the people who are in the greatest distress at the present time; they are not intended to be. In my opinion the greatest reform of all was that put into operation by the Liberal government when they were in power; I refer to the Old Age Pensions Act of 1927. By it men and women of seventy years of age, subject to certain conditions, can get a pension of \$20 a month for the rest of their lives. This brings comfort and security to them in their declining years and is a small recognition of what they have contributed to the welfare of this country. I have seen many people approaching the sunset of their lives made happy by the sense of security which that pension has brought them. We spent last year \$12,314,000 on old age pensions. According to the last census statistics there were in Canada 344,907 people over seventy years of age. Of people over sixty we have 870,000, and if the same proportion qualified, pensions could be given to those over sixty at an annual cost of \$31,047,600. Again if the veterans' allowance were changed so that the age of entitlement was fifty instead of sixty, it would cost \$7,500,000 instead of \$2,500,000. We have many different kinds of pensions in Canada. I believe in the idea of having pensions or dividends, for a very definite reason. We have judges' pensions, civil service pensions, and many other kinds. It seems to me that these should be reviewed, with the purpose of seeing to it that those who have the best organization and are in the best position to press their claims do not necessarily obtain the best treatment. I believe in the idea of giving dividends, because in no other way can purchasing power be put into the hands of a deserving class of people. We want these people to have purchasing power; we want them to have a reasonable standard of living, and in no other way can that be accomplished. Everyone will agree that the average man should carry insurance, also that if he can he should contribute to an old age pension, but there is a large class who find that quite impossible. It is hard for us to imagine a state in which

[Mr. Gershaw.]

all have the same degree of comfort; owing to the difference in our endowments some are better providers than others, and fortune does not smile with equal favour upon all. This condition of poverty for some has always been regarded as inevitable. Those of us who found ourselves in that position had either to work through or around it or to endure it. But I find in a book by J. A. Spender these words:

The self-consciousness which recognizes poverty as a curable evil is of comparatively recent growth, and may well be held hereafter to have been the most beneficent of all the changes of thought in the nineteenth century.

If we are to regard poverty as a curable condition we must make some preparations for curing it.

To whom should dividends be given? I would say first to the blind. We are all glad to know that at least some of the blind people are likely to get a pension in the very near future. I would say, second, to the fathers and the mothers who have children who should be at school. No one wishes to see young boys and girls forced out into the hard work of life when they should be in school. I would say, in the third place, to those who cannot provide sanitary homes for their families; to the under-privileged; to those who have given meritorious service to their country; to the disabled. Let us suppose the bread winner of the family is disabled; had he been killed his wife would have received the mother's allowance and would live in comfort, but as it is the disabled head of the family is left at home to be dependent upon charity. Then most particularly I would say that when men and women have reached a certain age they are entitled to a pension if they will retire from the labour market and make way for the younger men and women who are growing up. You may destroy the morale of a young person by a pension, but you would not destroy the morale of a person sixty or over.

Now, why should dividends be given? Because the classes of persons to whom I suggest they should be given are citizens of a solvent country and are entitled to share in its natural resources. During the last fifty years great changes have taken place; machines have been invented; there have been advances in scientific thought. Drudgery is no longer necessary to the extent that it was, and more time should be given to leisure and to artistic pursuits. Dividends would give people an opportunity for enjoyment, and their cultural heritage is their claim on a share of Canada's assets.