

Suggested Pension Payment Corrections

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear. I shall hold you to that.

Mr. Munro: We are continuing to assess the effectiveness of our present programs and to examine proposals for their supplementation and consolidation. The suggestions offered in the course of this afternoon's debate by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, the hon. member for Perth (Mr. Monteith) and the hon. member for Champlain (Mr. Matte) are helpful and will, I assure the house, be taken into consideration.

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, as I rise to speak this afternoon on pensions and on the poverty which often arises as a consequence of inadequate pensions a quotation from Oliver Goldsmith's poem, "The Deserted Village", comes to mind:

Ill fares the land to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay.

Those words are as true today as they were when they were written many years ago. I welcome this opportunity to speak on the subject of pensions and poverty as it affects many Canadians. It is one which should be of deep concern to everybody. All Canadians should be asking why there is so much poverty and hardship in a country as rich as ours. They should be asking why such a situation is allowed to continue. They should ask why governments have been so ineffective in dealing with the situation. They should ask whether the solutions so far proposed are adequate and, if the answer is yes, why these solutions have not been applied.

I ask these questions, Mr. Speaker. Perhaps we can obtain from the government today an explanation for the lengthy delay in dealing adequately with the state of affairs I have described. We have just heard from the minister. He has sketched briefly the activities of the government in this field; I felt he was defending the present Canadian pensions system. It is true he said consideration would be given to the ideas put forward by previous speakers—and I certainly hope this will be the case—but despite this assurance I remind hon. members that we still have with us in Canada today a major problem involving all those who are in receipt of pensions income. As my friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) mentioned earlier, these people fall into a number of groups—old age pensioners, those in receipt of war veterans allowances, and so on.

[Mr. Munro.]

I do not think there is a member of this house who does not have in his office a thick file of letters dealing with pension matters. I have one, and I am certain other members receive similar letters from constituents and from organizations asking that something be done to ease the situation of those who are obliged to live on fixed incomes. When I consider some of the hardships that these people face I find myself wondering how governments can remain in power as long as they do. Remember, this problem has been with us for a long time. It is still here, and in my opinion it will remain with us until a basic change is made in the concept of pensions and the manner in which they should be granted to citizens.

Mr. Alexander: Or until there is new leadership.

Mr. Harding: I shall refer now to a question which has concerned me a great deal since I came to the House of Commons—the fact that though provision is made for pensions to vary year by year if the cost of living rises, the amount of the increase is not related to anything which is logical or sensible. We have on the statute books at the present time a provision which states that 2 per cent a year is the maximum increase which an old age pensioner may receive, even if the increase in the cost of living amounts to double the 2 per cent figure or more. I raised this issue in the house some time ago and I intend to bring it up again. We, the politicians who are elected by the men and women across Canada who go to the polls, make the laws. We can also change the laws. If 2 per cent is inadequate—and I suggest it certainly is—all that is required is for a majority of the elected members of this house to make up their minds that a change will be made and that change will be written into the statute.

• (4:20 p.m.)

One party in this house has a clear majority, the Liberal party. If the 2 per cent is to be changed it is the Liberal party that must change it. The opposition groups are willing to go along with such a change; all we need is some assistance from the backbenchers of the Liberal party.

Mr. Alexander: What a hope!

Mr. Harding: That is what I say. I do not think they dare make such a move. However, their constituents know they are not willing to make this move. The power is in their