

I do not want to appear as a philosopher but I know the difficulties there are very human and deep. Both sides deny the recognition of individuals and groups and it is of necessity, therefore, an extremely violent, fundamental and basic conflict. One often tends to pass judgment on the rights of one party or the other in these circumstances, but I want to avoid that temptation. One can express, as the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) has done, his shock and dismay at the consequence of the acts of either party involving innocents. One can express that dismay; however, one must refrain from passing judgment as to the motivation for the acts that are performed.

The comments of the hon. member have been noted. As I pointed out, the government has indicated its position. It has indicated its reaction to the repugnant acts not only of one side but of the other. I take it the hon. member is content that the government has been very active and analytical in its consideration of the facts.

SOCIAL SECURITY—PROPOSED INCREASE IN OLD AGE PENSION AND STUDY OF RETIREMENT POLICIES

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, November 27, as recorded at page 9495 of *Hansard*, I put this question to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde):

Mr. Speaker, in view of the fact that the Canadian Council on Social Development has recently published a report entitled "How Much Choice—Retirement Policies in Canada" in which it is declared that more than half of the senior citizens of this country exist on incomes at or below the poverty level, may I ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare if consideration will be given to an immediate catch-up increase in old age pensions, and will the government also institute a study of retirement policies in this country?

The answer of the minister, which appears at page 9496 of *Hansard* for the same day, was to the effect that in this view there are different levels of poverty and that he was not sure it would be useful to have a general debate on the poverty level. He concluded his answer with this sentence: As for the member's suggestion for an immediate increase in the basic pension, the matter is not being considered at the present time but, as I said to the hon. member, it will be increased according to the rise in the cost of living as of January 1 next.

I readily understand the attitude of the minister every time I put these questions to him in defending the government's old age security program. I have a fair amount of pride in it myself because I have been involved in it over a good many years. Although one can compare what is done for older people today with what was done ten, 20, 30 or 40 years ago and realize that we have made progress, surely we never come to the end of the road. Surely what counts is the living conditions of our senior citizens today, compared with today's standards.

I hope, therefore, that the government will join with me in welcoming the report produced by the Canadian Council on Social Development entitled "How Much Choice—Retirement Policies in Canada" which was written by Joan C. Brown. I hope the government will pay attention to the facts in this volume and the proposals made therein. It does document the situation with respect to retirement at the present time. It is ever so much better than it was a quarter or half century ago, but it is still true that more

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than half of our people 65 years of age and over are at or near the poverty level. It is also true that our pension plans, good as they are, are not filling the bill. Proud though we may be of what we have accomplished, surely common sense and ordinary decency require that we take another look at our whole system. That is what this report calls for and I urge the government to undertake it.

● (2210)

There are a couple of points made in this report which are extremely important and which, it seems to me, go to the heart of the issue. One is that although no one should write off what the private sector could do, it does seem to be a fact that the best chance of improving pensions for everyone lies in substantial improvements to the Canada Pension Plan, for example, getting it to the point at which it pays, let us say, 75 per cent instead of 25 per cent of one's recent earnings. I hope the government will consider this very seriously—the need to improve substantially the advantages of the Canada Pension Plan in association with old age security measures.

Another point which is made in this document, and one which I believe to be of extreme importance, has to do with the age of retirement. The author urges very strongly that we should introduce more voluntariness into the question of the retirement age and that persons over the age of 60, indeed between 60 and 70, should have the option whether to retire or not. This may be putting it in language somewhat different from the language I sometimes use when I call for the pension to be brought down to the age of 60 for those out of the labour market, but in effect it is the same proposal. However, my purpose is not to get into an argument between two doctrinaire positions, but rather to urge the validity of my assertion that further studies should be made as to the retirement age and that the government should take this matter seriously.

I have just about reached the end of the time allotted to me on this subject tonight. I trust I can persuade the government to make a serious study of the pension situation. I know this cannot be done in a week or a month or even, with the present government, in a year. It takes time. But it is grossly unfair to those who are at or below the poverty level to fob them off with a statement that a study is being made. That is why there should be an immediate catch-up increase in the basic amount of old age security. Though the minister said the other day that the matter is not being considered, I hope that in his absence the parliamentary secretary will speak from his own heart tonight and admit that such an increase ought to be provided without delay.

Mr. Bob Kaplan (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I should like to thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) for doing his usual job of helping to put before us and before all Canadians the situation of our senior citizens, their standard of living, and their treatment at the hands of the government. I might say, since he has asked for a response on my part, that my earnest desire is to become, one day, a senior citizen of Canada.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It doesn't take long.