

Social Development Ministry

tures for social programs and to see that we do not have any new programs unless the government can eliminate some that we now have.

On the one hand, the minister seemed to be indicating that we had made great progress in the 1960s and 1970s. He listed medicare, the Canada and Quebec Pension Plans, the guaranteed income supplement and the Canada Assistance Plan as important steps, which they were in improving the lifestyle of many Canadians. Then he went on to indicate that the purpose of this ministry would be to see that ceilings be placed on expenditures. The minister said at page 2133 of *Hansard* the following:

—that new high priority programs should be financed largely out of the proceeds from the elimination of other expenditures—

The only expansion which the minister could foresee in the coming year was this:

—our social policy envelope for 1980-81 will be increased by an amount sufficient to pay for our increased guaranteed income supplement—

That was a strange objective from a minister who had said a moment or two before the following:

The distribution of income in Canada is largely unchanged despite all the social policy changes of the 1960s and 1970s. Crime and poverty have not disappeared. Today, Canada has more poor children than ten years ago and the problems of many pensioners are still with us. The majority of Canadians still have no pension coverage other than that financed through the public sector.

Having said that, Mr. Speaker, and having given a very concise description of the problems which are still faced by millions of Canadians, the minister then went on to say that, despite all that, in effect the government is not going to do anything about them because it does not have the money.

I think we ought to look at some of the problems which are still with us and which the minister alluded to very briefly. For instance, if we look at the distribution of income in Canada and at what has happened over a period of almost 30 years, we see that the families and unattached individuals who make up the bottom one-fifth of the income earners of this country, or the 20 per cent at the bottom, got 4.4 per cent of the gross national product in 1951, while the top fifth, or the top 20 per cent, got 42.8 per cent.

After all these tax programs, all of the income distribution programs, after the implementation of medicare, the Canada Pension Plan and the increase in the old age pension and unemployment insurance—all the programs which governments, federal and provincial, have inaugurated since 1951—what do we see? In 1978 the percentage of the gross national product which the bottom one-fifth of Canadians got had not risen. In fact, it had dropped from the 4.4 per cent in 1951 to 3.9 per cent in 1978 whereas the top fifth of the population received 42.5 per cent of the gross national product. How the minister can let the House and the people of Canada believe that we have solved most of the problems and therefore do not have to think about any new expenditures or new redistribution of income to at least move toward more equity in our society, I simply do not know.

Let me give one more illustration of how the income disparities affect people in this country. If we look at the distribution

of money among income earners, we find that the young and families whose heads are over 65 years of age dominate the lower quintile; that is, the lowest and second lowest fifth of the population. The biggest gainers of income are those families in the 45 to 65 age group, followed closely by the 24 to 44 age group. The situation of the young and the aged is not improving at all.

The argument in favour of the Ministry of State for Social Development is put forward by the government on the basis of planning and co-ordination of federal spending on social programs. The minister indicates that he hopes to control the expenditures, that he wants high priority programs to be financed from other expenditures and he wants to make trade-offs when presenting new proposals; in other words, eliminating some of the programs that we have been operating until now.

The minister wants to control the expenditures. This is an extremely unfortunate argument when one reviews the social and economic problems in this country. As I have indicated, the income distribution has not improved at all in almost 40 years. That being the case, we find it strange that the government wants to proceed with the objective of holding the line on new programs, which would at least move us toward a more equitable system for our people.

When one looks at the distribution of income, it is evident that those families with heads over 65 years of age dominate the lowest quintile of the income earners. Of the bottom one-fifth of the income earners in this country, 33.5 per cent come from families whose head is over 65 years of age. In 1977 a Statistics Canada study of income distribution indicated that 50.3 per cent of those 65 to 69 years of age, and 63 per cent of those 70 and over, were living in poverty.

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Given that kind of information, we find it alarming that the minister would indicate that the government has decided that this country cannot do better for the people who are in need. We find that two-thirds of the unmarried women 65 and over, that is, 400,000 women, were living in poverty in 1975. This is the government which says it cannot do any more. The situation obviously will get much worse in years to come because of our rapidly aging population.

Let us look at another field over which the minister will have a good deal of influence, the situation with regard to housing. A discussion paper prepared by the Canadian Council for Social Development shows how government housing policies have benefited people in the upper and middle-income groups who are largely the people who own their own homes. It is pointed out that in the spring of 1970 the average net worth of home owners was \$23,476, while the average net worth of renters was \$3,949. The average net worth of home owners thus exceeded that of renters nearly six times over. By the spring of 1977, this economic advantage for home owners had accelerated considerably. Their average net worth was over \$71,000, which exceeded the \$8,900 average for renters by a little over eight times.