

Pensions

by younger people, with some differences, such as children in families to be cared for and the fact that you do not need certain things because you do not go out to work. You cannot measure these things in dollars. You cannot measure them in actuarial tables and contributions. You have to measure them in terms of a relationship, and the only body which can ensure that that relationship is maintained is the people of Canada through their government.

I say again that what we have done is tremendous and what the present minister has done is tremendous.

An hon. Member: Don't get carried away.

Mr. Knowles: Anybody who has kept the right-wingers in the cabinet from cutting back on pensions deserves—

Mr. Broadbent: Don't give her too much.

Mr. Knowles: —a compliment, and I do not hesitate to give it.

An hon. Member: That's enough, Stanley.

Mr. Knowles: My hon. friend, the minister, hears the remarks I am getting from behind me!

An hon. Member: We are beginning to suspect something.

Mr. Knowles: I am concerned that she not be led astray by the idea that we do not need to do any more through the public sector, that it can be done in the private sector. One of the ways in which the minister could demonstrate her realization that the public sector should start moving forward is to increase immediately the basic amount of old age security. She shoved me off the other day with such an absolute rejection of that suggestion that even I was a bit shocked. Here I was, quoting a William Mercer Ltd. official, Laurence Coward of all people, as conservative and cautious as he could be, pointing out that a scheme which does not meet the needs of 53 per cent must have something wrong with it. They were arguing that this money put into the basic old age security should be accompanied by a change in the tax structure so that those at the top who do not need it will pay it all back, and that was the solution. I say that something like that should be done and that certainly today's senior citizens should be getting pensions of \$500 a month right now.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: I believe the Canada Pension Plan must be enlarged. The proposal which came from the Ontario royal commission is not nearly as valuable and effective as it would be to enlarge the Canada Pension Plan so that, instead of paying pensions equal to 25 per cent of the income one had at retirement, the pension should be 50 per cent or 75 per cent; or, at least, a combination of the Canada Pension Plan and old age security should amount to 75 per cent or 90 per cent. We should start moving in that direction now.

Then there is the whole question of lowering the age of retirement. The minister, while she is in that office, really

must correct that abomination of the spouse's allowance which protects certain women, since it is mostly women between the ages of 60 and 65 who get it, but does nothing for women who are unattached, single, widowed or divorced. She must do something better than she has proposed thus far about the Canada Pension Plan with respect to housewives. She must stick to what she knows is right in this field, and that is universality. We are not talking about ways and means of handing out welfare or meeting particular needs; we are talking about the philosophy of life which says our older people are just as much a part of the Canadian family as are the rest. That has to be done for the others too.

My friend, the hon. member for Vancouver East (Mrs. Mitchell), has a lot to say about what we should be doing for children. My friend, the hon. member for Beaches (Mr. Young), has a lot to say about what we should be doing for the handicapped. But let us not pull back from what we have done for our older people by trying to turn part of it over to the private sector.

While we are dealing with this, there are a few individual matters I should like to mention. As I said, we should be doing more for widows than providing these 50 per cent pensions. If the husband dies first, the widow gets only a 50 per cent pension, but if the wife dies first, the husband gets 100 per cent. This is for the birds. We have to do something about railway pensions. I mention that because for the most part they come under the direction of the federal government. We have to do something to improve the public service pensions and veterans' pensions.

I am mentioning these things briefly, one after another, because I see the clock moving faster than it does when other members are speaking! I see your finger, Mr. Speaker, and I am just about ready to sit down. This will not be my last speech on pensions. I shall be back again. But right now I agree with the suggestion that we are facing a crisis, not in terms of funds but in terms of the difficulties people are facing and the way in which the government is going to go for the future.

In my view, one of the best things this House ever did in all the years I have been here was when it made old age security universal. This is my final word, Mr. Speaker. I say to the minister that what we must look forward to is the day when not just a pension but an adequate pension is universal for all our older people. The challenge to achieve that rests upon the government, but for today it rests on the shoulders of the Minister of National Health and Welfare.

Hon. Monique Bégin (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I heard it said years ago that an NDP member is a Liberal in a hurry.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!