

*Pensions*

I think we have to consider some of the factors which are involved in this situation. One of the things that the private pension people do by way of confusing the picture is to bring together such factors as savings, redistribution of income and a pension policy. They talk a lot about pensions involving savings and about how all this works together and the savings help to keep the economy going, and so forth. They have to be treated separately. The private sector wants to get into the pension field because it gets hold of savings, and then that is supposed to improve the economy. It just does not work that way. Saving is one thing to be done for the purposes of the economy. Redistribution of income through income tax arrangements and so forth in the economy is another thing. But pension policy guaranteeing that everyone will have a standard of living at least equal to what his standard of living was when he retired has to be a matter which stands on its own feet. There has to be a pension policy for the nation as a whole, and no private industry and no collection of insurance companies is in a position to be concerned about all our senior citizens in the way it is possible for that concern to be expressed by the government.

As I say, I am grateful for the invitation to the conference. I look forward to listening to the presentations which are made. Hon. members can tell me my mind is made up before I go there if they want. It is. I just know that the only way we will get coverage for all our people is for the government to have an over-all public pension policy. The statistics I have already given indicate that most of the people of my generation—and everybody knows I am seven years past the pension age of sixty-five—who have anything to go on have it because of what the government has put in place.

Earlier the government talked of old age security and the Canada Pension Plan as the base “and let the private people build on top of it”. For most people the base is all they have, and most of our senior citizens who enjoy any kind of security in terms of income, housing, health or what have you, do so because of public policy.

In this respect, though I am being critical I am also being boastful and offering compliments. What we have done in this field is tremendous, considering what the situation was 50 years ago. However, we have to go on with this process. We have to keep in mind that what we want is for all our retired people to have a standard of living when they retire which is just as good as it was before retirement. We want that standard to go up, and the only way it can do that is by having the public sector carry the major portion of the responsibility.

I expect the Minister of National Health and Welfare to listen, as she will as one of the hosts of this National Pensions Conference, to the pleas which will be made there, but I regret that the minister has not, even before that conference, presented to this House and prepared for presentation to the conference policies which show that the government is prepared to expand the public side in this whole pension field.

As I say, that is the fundamental issue that is facing us in the pension field. We do not have to argue any more that there should be pensions and that everyone should be covered. It

took a while to win that point. I was here for the battles, but we won them.

Whether we are going to have pensions which are adequate and whether senior citizens will have not just enough to stay alive but enough to enjoy the standard of living they have made possible depends upon whether we have a policy which will bring this about. A policy relying on the private sector will not. We need a policy relying on the public sector to do that important job.

I urge that the minister take this plea of mine seriously. I do not have to tell her that it is a plea from a friend. It is a plea from one who has been concerned about pensions and who is very appreciative of what we have accomplished. But if we start veering the other way, letting the private industry, with its concern for profits, have a larger role, if we cut back on the proportion of the job we feel that governments should do, there will be a state of crisis for our senior citizens down the road.

● (1550)

What we have to be concerned about in pension policy is not how many dollars a person now 50 years of age or 30 years of age will have at age 65. That is the approach that private industry takes; it thinks in terms of how many dollars have to be put into some fund or account so that there will be a certain amount at retirement age. There is no way of telling what amount of dollars will be required ten or 20 years from now for an adequate pension. What we have to establish is a relationship. We have to establish as a principle that people who have done their share of the nation's work, whether in industry or in the home, are entitled when they reach retirement age to a portion, a share, of that decade's wealth, that decade's production, so that their standard of living is equal to that of people who are still working.

Can the private sector do that? It could not possibly do it. The only sector which can concern itself with pensions as a matter of relationship, as a matter of fairness, is the public sector. That is why we have the Department of National Health and Welfare. I remember the time when we did not have one. When I first came to this House, there was no Department of National Health and Welfare and old age pensioners were an item in the estimates of the minister of finance. We usually reached that item on the last day of the session or thereabouts although I managed to make quite a few speeches before we got there. However, we got over that. Mr. King was the one who brought in provisions for a Department of National Health and Welfare.

We have come a long way since then. I know I have said it half a dozen times already, but I know how true it is because I remember what life was like for the generation before me. I remember the plight of the senior citizens 70 and 75 years old back in the 1920s and 1930s. As I said, since then we have come a long way. But it is no longer good enough just to provide sufficient money to keep these people alive. What we have to establish is a relationship according to which Canadians who are 65, 70 or 75 years of age or older are entitled to enjoy the same standard of living as that enjoyed at that time