

Senior Citizens

It is in the best interests of the work that has been done in the past that this Bill be referred to a Committee and not be talked out in this House, and for the very reasons that the previous speaker, the Hon. Member for Scarborough West (Mr. Weatherhead), attempted to persuade the House that it should not. The problems and solutions have been well-known to anyone who has been interested in the whole question of aging. In fact, the United Nations World Assembly, to which the Hon. Member for Scarborough West referred, took place at the end of July and beginning of August of last year. I was a Member of the Canadian delegation which attended that World Assembly. One of the seniors who is on the Canadian Advisory Council on Aging, Mr. Chuck Bailey from British Columbia, spoke to me at the end of that UN Assembly. He said: "When you guys get back to Canada, you will probably hear that another assembly will be held, that another conference on aging will be held to discuss the problems that senior citizens in the country are faced with".

I did not realize it at the time, but I have come to realize that all the information that I received as a delegate to that assembly provides all the arguments required to make the case that finally work should begin to be done rather than being spoken about again and again. Mr. Bailey said to me that all that anyone would require to gain full knowledge about the problems that elderly people face, and which we will all face when we reach that magic age of 65, is in the report of the National Advisory Council on Aging, which was the non-governmental organizations' report to the Minister of National Health and Welfare in preparation for that assembly. He told me that the other document that would give me full information was the Canadian Government report on aging, which was also considered by that assembly, as well as a copy of the address made to the assembly by the leader of the Canadian delegation. Those three documents list every argument, every problem and every solution required to solve the crisis that people face at age 65.

I would like to see this Bill referred to a committee so that Members of this House can begin putting together programs to address the real problem that people face when reaching age 65. It is not enough to say that all programs that can benefit people at age 65—and I will come back to this in a moment—must be dealt with by the Provinces. I do not accept that at all. I appreciate that many of the programs in place are cost-shared between the provincial and federal Governments, and in some cases with municipal governments or regional authorities. It is not right to slide out from under our responsibility to deal with those problems in a factual way, sloughing it off to some other level of Government. From my examination of the problems I conclude that we will be abdicating our responsibility as Members of Parliament and as responsible Canadians if we do not address them in a very real way. That is why I would like to see the Bill finally go to a committee in order that we can begin that kind of work.

A year or so ago the Members of this Party, both in caucus and at convention, recognized that we live in an aging world, that by the year 2000 the average population is likely to be quite elderly as opposed to that which exists today. For that

purpose we established a task force to look into the problems of older women in particular. Our past experience, and certainly the one that exists today, shows that while most elderly persons at age 65 look forward to spending the balance of their life living in poverty, statistics show that elderly women in particular look forward to a harder life than males.

There are some two million Canadians now over 65. According to Statistics Canada, with 3.7 million people now aged between 25 and 34, the number of people over 65 will more than double when the "baby boom" generation begins to retire. By the year 2015 and the following decades, the global population of elderly will reach a staggering one billion, or approximately the size of China's population today. In 20 years the number of women over 65 in Canada will reach two million, outnumbering the men of the same age by two to one. Yet older women, especially single older women, are more likely to experience poverty than any other group in society.

● (1610)

In addition, Mr. Speaker, Statistics Canada labour force studies confirm that age discrimination persists where workers over 45 have longer bouts of unemployment than younger workers and only 27 per cent of workers over 55 have any jobs at all. As to retirement income, the same statistics tell us that 43 per cent of the Canadian population has no investment or private pension income. So for very many of them, retirement means poverty. Fifty per cent of people over 65 live on less than \$6,000 a year. After 11 provincial and federal task forces, various Royal Commissions, reports on pension reform including the recent federal Green Paper "Better Pensions for Canadians", reform for the elderly is still very remote in the sense of providing an adequate retirement income for most people at age 65.

To minimize and indeed attempt to dismiss the fact that elderly Canadians have problems at age 65 is really quite surprising. I know the Hon. Member for Scarborough West is a gentleman who would not do that lightly, and the facts show quite differently. You can hardly look at any media coverage on the personal examination of a person or persons over 65 without becoming quite concerned. For example, a recent study in Ontario showed that Ontario's older women who are widowed, divorced or separated and living alone are the most disadvantaged group in society. In the metropolitan Toronto area alone there is an estimated 36,000 of these older women living below the federal Government's poverty line. That particular study shows that the median income of these women was \$5,645 a year in the 65 to 74 age group, and only \$4,964 per year for those aged 75 and over. This is an area to be somewhat concerned about.

In another article which appeared in the *Toronto Star* recently, written by Steve Kerstetter, for example, it was pointed out that Ottawa pays a Guaranteed Income Supplement to people over age 65 with little income other than the federal Old Age Security. It also pays spouse's allowance to people between 60 and 65 in similar circumstances. However,