

Old Age Security Act

selves, clothe themselves, get the required drugs, maintain a house, pay their fuel, taxes, electricity, telephone and sometimes a little trip to go and visit the children, which is quite normal and human, on such a small pension?

I know provincial governments have passed welfare legislation to help people in need and the government of Canada pays 50 per cent of those expenditures under the Canada Assistance Plan.

In Quebec, since the revision of welfare legislation the rules are too stringent. When a person or a couple ask for help because they cannot support themselves, if they own a house, in most cases they have to part with it as a prerequisite for eligibility for assistance, which I consider inhuman.

I cannot bring myself to accept that after 40 or 45 years of hard work and often under difficult conditions to participate in the development of this country our people over 60 cannot be provided with better living conditions. The scandal of poverty and insufficient income of people 60 and over is obvious. Canada despite its immense resources is far from showing a comforting image to those who are hungry for human justice and dignity.

One Canadian out of three lives socially, economically, politically and culturally on the fringe of society. The living conditions imposed upon a great number of people over 60 are an insult to justice and an evil in one of the richest countries in the world.

We all bear collectively the responsibility for that situation. I accept readily that in the field of social security this country is one of the more advanced in the world but we can do even better and it is for that reason that I say we should take immediate action.

However fascinating because of horizons opened to us, the times which we are living are nevertheless often, alas, the source of many disappointments, particularly for those who are no longer admitted on the labour market and cannot receive a guaranteed income while awaiting the old age security pension.

The Christian message is clear: God is calling upon us by the signs of the time, by daily events. "Feed your starving brethren, clothe those who are cold, give a roof to the homeless." In concrete terms, Mr. Speaker, today that means there should be a minimum guaranteed annual income for each and everyone, and more specifically for people of 60 and over.

In a message released on the occasion of 1972 Labour Day, Canadian bishops expressed serious concern about the problem of distribution. It was called the "sharing message". And the problem of inadequate sharing is a real challenge for the bishops.

The message read as follows, and I quote:

PROSPERITY, FOR WHOM?
—FOR THE "SYSTEM"?
—FOR MAN?

Let us not be deluded by the theory that says that general economic prosperity ends up by being of benefit to all. Despite the increase in the GNP, unemployment remains a real plague just about everywhere throughout the world: the rich grow richer, the poor, poorer.

That is why we must talk about it and without delay.

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

Finally, I should like to quote you a last paragraph of that message on which we should meditate as legislators:

Over forty years go, Pope Pius XI reminded us that, on their own, profit and economic growth ill-serve the people. "In the final analysis, any program intended to increase production has no object unless it serves man. Its purpose is to reduce disparities, fight against discrimination, free man of his bonds, enable him to be the master of his own material well-being, his moral progress and his spiritual fulfilment."

Like the so-called underdeveloped countries Canada needs new criteria of prosperity which will give priority to human fulfilment, co-operation and a sense of community. In the search for a new social approach, Christians must not stand on the sidelines. The values we live by dictate that we do. By withdrawing, we sin grievously against our social duty.

That is why we worked so hard, to try and help the government to get Parliament to pass legislation that corresponds to the ideas and principles that I have just mentioned. I quote again:

If Christians in Canada wish to contribute to building our society, they cannot fail to take note of new policies that aim at subordinating economic growth to a fairer distribution of the national income. And this objective can be achieved by applying a modern policy that established a guaranteed minimum yearly income based on the material potential of our country, and sufficient to enable people in these categories to lead a well-deserved normal life during their final years.

Mr. Speaker, I agree with that message and this is why I consider that the spouse should be eligible for the old age security pension, whatever his or her age, provided the other is eligible under the act.

I know in advance that I will be told that the most generous party in legislation concerning older citizens was the Liberal party. I do not question it, but I should like to add that this has been materially possible through the labour of the generations that preceded us and of the people now aged 50 or over.

The government only legislated in order that the benefits of a life within society be truly available to its members. I sometimes wonder about those people who, in their early life and even in the best year of their lives, have toiled for very long hours each day in return for very low salaries, and also about those who were in business, as merchants or farmers, who earned net incomes that were sometimes ridiculous and had to assume the whole cost of their children's education, and I compare to theirs the easy life of our young people today who reap the result of the endeavours of those who have today reached the sixties, and I submit that the legislators' duty is to adopt legislation guaranteeing those persons at least an honest subsistence, without their being compelled to crawl on their knees to beg their daily bread.

Many of those aged people who have weathered extremely difficult years have not made the count of their hours of labour, and it is thanks to their industriousness which spurred them that today's young people can benefit from numerous advantages in all respects, which the people aged 60 or over could never enjoy.

Is there a more noble deed for a couple, besides contributing to the development of their country, than having also provided it generously with the most lavish gift, that is human capital, making it the richer for the many children they bore and which are today its glory.