

Expansion of Social Security

in prodding whatever government has been in power to put social security legislation on the statute books. This country will never forget, and indeed it never should forget, the debt that it owes to my predecessor, the former member for Winnipeg North Centre, the late J. S. Woodsworth, for the part he played nearly 40 years ago in prodding the government of that day to place upon the statute books our first old age pension act. But, Mr. Speaker, even after we catalogue the things we have on our statute books that come under the heading of social security legislation, such as old age pensions, family allowances, pensions for the blind, pensions for the disabled, unemployment insurance, benefits of various kinds for our veterans—

Mr. Basford: All Liberal measures.

Mr. Knowles:—I want to say quite frankly that I do not think we really have very much to boast about. In terms of the affluence of our society, in terms of the amount of wealth we are capable of producing, in terms of what we can make available for certain kinds of projects, the speed with which we can raise money for war, if necessary, the way we can raise money for other projects—in the light of all that I submit we are really not doing very well in this terribly important human field, the field of social security. I urge very strongly, if we are concerned about our image as a nation in the eyes of the world, if we are concerned about having a country over which we can proudly fly whatever flag we choose, that we pay very serious attention to filling the gaps in our social security program and to improving the pieces of legislation we already have on the statute books.

In the resolution itself I refer specifically to some of the gaps. The first one I mention is medicare. It is only a couple of years ago, of course, that this was a very warm subject in one of the provinces of this country. Some people thought that the government of that province was away ahead of its time in what it was endeavouring to put on the statute books of that province, but in a matter of months medicare became a part of the platform of most of the political parties of this country. I suggest that we really will not be a civilized country, we will really not be showing concern for the country and for the human beings who make up our country, until we have a program of medicare for all citizens of this country. Just as it took participation by the federal government along with the provinces to get hospitalization on a na-

[Mr. Knowles.]

tion-wide basis, so it will take participation by the federal government in a program of medicare if we are to get legislation of this kind for all our people.

Another gap that we must soon try to fill is that of providing income maintenance to persons who are unemployed because of illness. This has long been one of the main weaknesses in our unemployment insurance legislation, namely that when people are unemployed because of illness there is no unemployment insurance benefit for them. Oh, we improved the act a few years ago in one slight respect. We now provide that if a person becomes unemployed because there is no job for him, is healthy at the time, starts drawing his unemployment insurance benefits and later becomes ill, he can continue to draw his unemployment insurance benefits. But for those who are unable to go to work because of illness there is no general program for the maintenance of income. This is a very serious gap in our social security legislation.

The next two references in my resolution are to widows with dependant children and survivors generally. I welcome the fact that tomorrow we shall be considering the proposed amendment to the **British North America Act**, otherwise known as the constitution of Canada, under which we hope to be able to bring in the revised version of the Canada pension plan which will include, as we now understand it, provisions for widows of certain ages and widows with dependant children. This is good. We are glad to know we are moving in this direction. But even after we enact the proposals that have been placed before us in certain documents that have been laid on the table I suggest we will still have a long way to go.

Then there is the whole question of the age at which pensions are payable. At the moment the only age at which one can get an old age pension with no means test is 70. Under the new Canada pension plan it will be possible to get a pension at age 65 but for a great many people, particularly for women but also for many men, the fact remains that there are times when that pension is needed at age 60. I think we are going to have to consider this whole question in these terms. This is one of the areas that I feel should be receiving close attention. This is one of the gaps that needs to be filled.

Our unemployment insurance legislation needs to be overhauled. We have been assured that this is being considered, but like some other things under this slow moving