

Supply—Health and Welfare

As to blind persons and disabled persons, I think that members in all parts of the house must blush with a good deal of shame when they think of how inadequate our assistance is for this important sector of the Canadian economy comprising people who certainly should be given all the food they can use, all the medical services they require and have those things which we can make available in Canada. I must commend the minister for the studies being carried on by the department in connection with planning for the aged in Canada. Unfortunately we are about 25 years behind the times in facing up to the problem. Twenty-five or more years ago countries like Great Britain, the United States and the Scandinavian countries started in at the point where we now are. It now seems that anyone over 45 is in the category of the ageing at least. I checked the Parliamentary Guide yesterday, and I found that the minister is in that category. He was so young when I first came here in 1940 that I cannot realize he is now over 45.

Mr. Martin: You are not calling me an old man?

Mr. Nicholson: No, I am not, but I am suggesting the minister is in the category of those 45 or older. A great many Canadians in that category who lose their jobs are finding it increasingly difficult to get positions. The only way anyone can avoid growing old is to die young, and not very many of us are prepared to take that course of action. I am glad the minister has made a start in studying the very real problem of the ageing. I have in my hand a publication called "Everyone Grows Old" put out by the Canadian Welfare Council. It points out that in 1951 7·8 per cent of Canadians were over 65. It estimates that 20 years later the percentage will be 8·8, and that by 1980 10 per cent of the Canadian population will be over 65.

In another publication I received from the minister's department it is pointed out that this really should not be a calamity, that with our modern developments and the great surpluses of foodstuffs in the world we should not consider it is any great embarrassment to have an increasing number of people in this category. But while we have these resources very little study has been done in Canada to find out how many people over 65 have to get by on the \$40 a month social security payment and how many get some assistance from their children or other organizations. It might be interesting to recall that there are three provincial governments in Canada which provide supplementary payments to people 65 or older. I refer to my own province of Saskatchewan and the provinces of

[Mr. Nicholson.]

Alberta and British Columbia. I must say that the province of Ontario has also accepted some responsibility for the people in this group.

As I understand it, the province of Ontario insists on the municipality matching the payment dollar for dollar, and these payments will be matched by the provincial government up to a maximum of \$10 per month. It might be worth reminding the committee that none of the Liberal provincial governments in Canada have so far provided a five-cent piece for supplementary benefits for people 65 or older. I gather this is the result of the conclusion of these provinces that the responsibility for the aged and ageing is a federal responsibility. Since the federal government is now providing comprehensive security benefits for everyone over 70, they conclude that if the individual requires more it should be the responsibility of the federal government to spend more.

As I said, I am glad a start has been made to study the problem. I am sure this study will convince the minister and everyone that there are at least three important decisions that will have to be reached. The first is that people in the group 65 or older must be given some public assistance so that they can find decent housing. I think it is unfortunate that so far the Minister of National Health and Welfare has not come forward with an offer of some assistance to provide decent housing for the people receiving old age pensions. His colleague the Minister of Public Works has made some money available on a loan basis. The hon. member for Vancouver East could speak more competently than I could regarding the very helpful arrangements that have been made with Central Mortgage and Housing, and public-spirited organizations in Burnaby, in connection with providing some housing for old age pensioners. As a result of the public, provincial and private assistance, a limited number of old age pensioners in the Burnaby area—I should say they have not been able to provide housing for nearly all who want it—have been able to get very attractive housing at around \$25 per month.

I think it is a great pity that the Minister of National Health and Welfare has not a section in his department now that is encouraging provincial and civic authorities to branch out in the field of public housing.

Mr. Martin: If my hon. friend will come over to the department some time, we will show him what we are doing.

Mr. Nicholson: I have all the information here.