

Guaranteed Income

believe otherwise than that the great majority of Canadians would prefer to work than to be unemployed and receiving a miserable pittance from the state. Therefore, I think this thing should be considered.

I would like to say to the hon. member that I attended a very important national meeting yesterday and the day before. Many useful things were discussed there. I refer to the meeting of the Progressive Conservative party of Canada. One thing we did discuss. The hon. member will be pleased with this. We reiterated our view that the spouse of a 65 year old recipient of OAS and other pensions should also be given that pension. I think it is a good thing. There is nothing personal involved in this, but it would be in the interests of a young wife to look after the husband if he is getting along in years. Keep him healthy. Keep him well. Keep him there! In a more serious way, it is only right, just and proper. It is an anomaly for a wife age 61 with a husband age 67 and both be treated by the state as if they were a single individual. I agree with the minister that it might be the other way around. Sometimes the young man may get the older lady. It is a matter of taste, preference and luck.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): What about the 61 year old woman who is single?

Mr. Macquarrie: I do not want to conduct a whole symposium on what should be done in every individual case. However, if hon. members wish to write me a letter, I will be glad to render a decision on each one.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): How about lowering the age from 65 to 60?

Mr. Macquarrie: Since the honourable and venerable member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) raised the question, at our national meeting we did discuss that very question of lowering the age from 65 to 60. I do not believe we should put people out to pasture when they are 60 years of age. I think we may be at the stage of development in our country where he or she who wishes to retire at age 60 should be able to do it in decency, comfort and dignity. I think this country is able to do that for its people.

I come back to another aspect that the hon. member has mentioned, that is the important aspect of incentive to work. It is said that we Presbyterians are great believers in the work ethic. We are told that the work ethic is dead. I have often been told this. However, it is not dead in those countries that are competing with us in the market places of the world. It is not dead in Japan, Germany or Switzerland. In these countries they are concerned when there are 100 people on the unemployment list. We are supposed to become accustomed to 750,000 month after month. We find that these are countries which still believe, apparently, in the work ethic, and they are taking markets from us. Whenever I go abroad I like to go to the harbours because I was born near the sea coast in Prince Edward Island. You see the flagships of nations all over the world but you won't see Canadian flagships there because in our outrageous stupidity we took ourselves out of the merchant marine, and we are losing out in competition all across the world. Other people have asked for consideration of the guaranteed annual income. Reuben

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

Baetz of the Canadian Council on Social Development said not long ago in one of the reports issued by that organization:

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It is my personal view that Canada both can and should provide, as a matter of right, sufficient income to support an adequate standard of physical and social well-being for all its people. This is based on a principle of social justice, now generally accepted in all advanced countries.

So I say to the hon. member that he is in good company. He is in company with Reuben Baetz and with the Senate of Canada. Other submissions have been made by the Canadian Labour Association. There is the Report on Poverty, and I suppose we can even say we have the orange paper. We have the program where now we are moving to a guaranteed income for some sectors of society.

There is a big experiment going on in Manitoba, and I assume the minister will tell us about it later this evening. I hope this experiment provides good results. I think it would be prudent to study the results most carefully. I have thought about a guaranteed annual income for a long time and I am like King Agrippa—I am almost persuaded. I am a little troubled about the effect on incentive as I implied in my earlier remarks. I hope it is an efficient method and that it will not come as just another layer on top of those we already have. In a highly bureaucratic society such as ours this might be a danger. But my own orientation is one of sympathy, and I am inclined to believe this is an idea which is coming into its own time.

When I first came to this House, the idea was way ahead of its time but I think now we may see it. I commend the hon. member for his interest and the philosophical manner in which he put forward his proposal. I liked his speech very much, especially when he referred to my favourite American of all time, perhaps one of the greatest men of all history, Thomas Jefferson. His quote from Jefferson was a very enduring one. So, we have Thomas Jefferson, the Senate of Canada and Major Douglas all on the same wave length.

It is important that we who are trying to represent our people—and we should care most for those who need care in our society—should set aside a day to deal with such matters. I have always been touched by the condition of our poor people, but in the last year or so, since I have been given special responsibilities within our caucus and have had the opportunity to hear from literally thousands of Canadians, I am all the more sensitized to the fact that far too many of our people are finding life far too hard. There is a vast area in which the government must move before we have anything even close to social justice, especially for the aged, the disadvantaged, the dispossessed. I think right now we should be able to say to the unemployable man that he will be looked after, that his problems are at an end, that he does not have to degrade himself by proving his incapacity and his poverty. That group should immediately be allotted a guaranteed income, if you like to call it that.

We must always be sure that the administrators temper their interpretation of the regulations with compassion. I had a man tell me he went in and asked how he could qualify for old age security. They said, come back in 33½ years and you will be all right. He said, I am 88 now.