

[English]

Mr. Fulton: Madam Speaker, I would ask that the motion be transferred for debate. It is very clear that the correspondence is between any cabinet ministers past or present and their staffs past or present, not the singular department referred to by the parliamentary secretary. I would ask that it be transferred for debate.

Madam Speaker: Transferred for debate.

[Translation]

Mr. Collette: Madam Speaker, I would ask that the remaining Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

Madam Speaker: Shall the remaining notices of motions for the production of papers stand?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY, S.O. 58—ALLEGED FAILURE TO EXPAND PUBLIC PENSION SYSTEM

Hon. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre) moved:

That this House condemns the government for failing to present, both to this House of Commons and to the forthcoming National Pensions Conference, a position for significantly expanding the public pension system in Canada in order to ensure that Canada's senior citizens, both now and in the future, will have an adequate standard of living in their retirement years.

He said: Madam Speaker, I present this motion today because I believe it brings into focus one of the important issues with respect to the state of pensions in Canada. It raises this question: Are we going to try to solve what has been referred to as the pension crisis by relying on the private sector to get its house in order and provide adequate pensions for our people, or are we going to realize that the only way in which to make sure that our retired people, both now and in the future, will have an adequate standard of living is by expanding the public role with respect to pensions?

With all the respect, appreciation and admiration I have for the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Miss Bégin), I fear that she is being led in the direction of relying more than has been the case in the past on the private sector. I hope that in this debate today we might persuade her that the future of the older people of Canada—those who are older now and all the rest who will get there some day—is much more secure if we rely in the main on expanding the public role in pensions.

● (1530)

Often times when I speak of pensions in Canada, I say two things that might seem to be contradictory. On the one hand, I

Pensions

assert that we have come a long way in the last 50 or 55 years. Indeed, I am even known to boast on behalf of my party about the role that we have played in helping to win a tremendous advance in the whole field of social security. On the other hand—and I do not regard this as contradictory because it is simply a case of there being two ways of looking at reality—there is still a great deal to be done to achieve the retirement goals that all of us in this House accept. By the same token, I have kind words for the Minister of National Health and Welfare who I think has done well in her role as minister.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: She has accomplished a number of things. I think both she and the Minister of Finance (Mr. MacEachen) take more credit than they deserve for what the \$35 increase last year did, but at least she accomplished that. She kept a promise that she had her party make in the last election campaign, and although it may be a negative compliment I offer to her, I think she has done well to keep the right-wingers in cabinet at bay.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles: I suspect that, had she not been there, we would have none of the improvements that we have seen recently and we might even have had cutbacks; so I am glad she is there. But just as I have said that there are two views with respect to pensions generally, so I say that her main job is still ahead of her. This is no time for any of us to rest on our laurels; the job is still ahead of us because everyone is talking today about the pension crisis.

Now, many people, when they hear that word, assume that it has something to do with the state of certain funds. People wonder whether there will be enough money to pay Canada Pension Plan benefits down the road or to pay old age security pensions at the indexed rates that will multiply in the next few years. I suggest that that is not the crisis. We pay pensions out of current production and income, not out of accumulations from the past, and any organized society can apportion the wealth that it produces to pay for the things it wants. If we want to provide adequate care for our children, provide education and adequate retirement income for the elderly, we can see that the money is available. The crisis relating to adequate pensions is not one of capacity to pay; it is the difficulty that older people are having in getting along on the amounts they receive. As the minister knows, about 60 per cent of the two million senior citizens age 65 and over live at or below the poverty line. That is all one needs to say to underline the fact that this is a state of crisis so far as pensions are concerned.

I point out also that about 53 per cent of the senior citizens who receive old age security also receive some or all of the guaranteed income supplement. To get all of that supplement one has to have virtually nothing else, and even to get a portion of it one has to have very little other income. This means, therefore, that 53 per cent of our senior population is in difficulty, as shown by the fact that those people have to apply for this supplement. Of the other 47 per cent, there are a few