

*Old Age Security Act*

should be done. We should be looking with concern and compassion upon a movement to lower the age of eligibility to 60. There is much to be done on this whole question.

I agree with the minister that it is a social priority; it is something that transcends legislation; it is a fundamental societal question. Perhaps at one stage in our social development we over-regarded the mere accumulation of years when societies believed that elder worship was the *summum bonum* of social values. It was believed that to be old was to be wise, was to be virtuous and, what was more important, was to be in command. Perhaps that was not too wise an appraisal. Perhaps Swift was right when he said:

• (1630)

Old men and comets have been revered for the same reason: their long beards and pretences to foretell events.

But our day sees perhaps rather too strong a reaction against gerontocracy. Now, many people believe that to be old is to be out of touch, to be out of things altogether.

Many people today who seek employment, not old people, people in their fifties or early sixties and the Prime Minister and I at age 53 would not accept that as old, get the cold turndown of refusal. There is too much the feeling that when one is no longer young, one is no longer needed. Perhaps we should remind ourselves, as Ulysses did in advanced age, that:

Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;

We should look thoughtfully and earnestly at this issue of lowering our retirement age. It should be viewed as something more than an early transfer of more and more of our citizens out to pasture. It must be regarded as something more than a way out of the unemployment mess which has plagued us again and again for ten years. But if the state makes early retirement possible we should, in our society, establish social values which make early retirement meaningful. Shakespeare put it well when he wrote:

Give me a staff of honour for my age.

But not a sceptre to control the world.

I agree that this is a question of profundity, of concern, and I do agree that it is one to which all levels of government must give the most earnest and thoughtful consideration. Perhaps we have in our labour-saving age reached a stage where the work force should indeed, can indeed, may indeed in the old fashioned sense, be much smaller. And yet existence must be meaningful. So, we get into the realm of leisure time activity. We have to find employment for those who want employment. We have to find a meaningful challenge for those who are employed. So, in the long run as we look upon these issues which concern the quality of life, we come back to regarding the quality of government. The government which cannot find employment for its people cannot bring about that quality of life which all its people, its workers and its leisured, are entitled to in a society with the values of ours.

The unemployment and the inflation of the last ten years have sapped our economy, have diminished the quality of life, and put us into the situation where the minister, while at one time indicating his great generosity

[Mr. Macquarrie.]

in bringing up many meaningful programs, points out that the economy is such that they cannot be undertaken.

One thing that did disturb me perhaps most of all in the minister's speech was the seemingly subtle suggestion that one sector of society, namely, the aged, should have their needs frozen while all other corrective measures are worked out. That strikes me as extremely unfair. Why go to these people and say, "You hold the line until we bring about a better society for the rest of our people." Why again take it out of the hides of the aged? If corrective measures are needed, and they are needed, let them be carried by all of society, and not make them uniquely a charge on those who are aged.

I note what the minister said about the mothers' allowance, the family allowance. We expect a family allowance bill which will provide increases, and we do not expect the kind of monstrosity that came up in the last parliament. I would say that the author of that bill should be given a job in the *Globe and Mail* doing the puzzle that is on the front page, that mathematical blister. That bill was an administrative nightmare. I hope we will have something that will be meaningful, and that will not have in it that psychology that you should take away from those who are already getting it, the "princely" sum now in the family allowance. I think that should be preserved, but we should also look to a realistic figure that will take heed of the rising costs of living.

Then, there are special categories. The minister mentioned some. Surely, we have reached the time when we can recognize that certain categories of our fellow citizens have such disabilities that their disabilities alone entitle them to compassion and consideration. Surely, a person who is without sight, a blind person, need not prove his poverty before he gets that allowance? Surely, too, the totally disabled, the person who for reasons beyond his control, and for physical reasons cannot go into the world and make his own way—surely he is a special case?

I hope the minister will pay particular note to the notice of motion which the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale) has placed on the order paper, one of the most thoughtful, perceptive and compassionate pieces of suggested legislation that I have seen in a long, long time. He invites special concern for the handicapped. And how often we can be so careless, Mr. Speaker. We build our public buildings so that people with wheelchairs cannot get in. We even have post offices where a lame man cannot climb up the steps. There is so much more we can do in this field. I remember that the hon. member for Oxford (Mr. Nesbitt) talked the other day about some of the problems of the disabled. He used the colourful expression, the rather painfully colourful expression, that in some cases you had to be devoid of both legs and arms to be considered disabled by those who hand out the allowance.

The minister did not deal with the New Horizons Program. I think that is an interesting program. If he were still here, I would tell him that I believe much can be done on a particular suggestion by a group in Charlottetown, but I will write to him about that. The creative activity of senior citizens should be encouraged.

I do not accept the idea that we should throw cold water now on the suggestion that the spouse of an old age