

Pensions

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I should like to direct my remarks mainly to the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Cafik). Before I do so I should like to commend the hon. member for Compton (Mr. Latuippe) for having placed this motion on the order paper. He was a little luckier in the draw than I; I have a similar motion on the order paper, but mine is No. 70 and his is No. 35. However, I have had previous opportunities, and there will be more, to press the point.

I should also like to say this with respect to the remarks made today by the hon. member for Compton. Although I do not share his economic theories I think he did well to tell this House that we do have the responsibility to order our economy so that the goods and services we produce are distributed on the basis of justice and fair play. There is nothing sacred about the way in which incomes just happen to fall, with some people getting too much and some not getting enough. Indeed, in my view the whole purpose of government, of organized society, is to see that all people get a fair and decent break. I agree with the hon. member for Compton and many others in this House that one of the groups for whom we should work particularly hard to see that they get a decent break is our senior citizens.

I said I should like to comment mainly on the speech just made by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. I enjoyed it, as I always do when parliamentary secretaries to ministers of national health and welfare give us the history of old age pensions in this country. If I did not know it already, having lived through most of it, I would certainly know it by heart from the number of times it has been given to us.

The member today did not go back to the beginning, as members sometimes do. But I would point out to him that even though we are paying \$100 a month today, compared to \$40 in the fifties or \$20 in 1926, that is beside the point. The question is: What is our total production in Canada today, and what can we afford out of that total production for the well-being and security of our older people?

I also submit that to make comparisons with other countries is beside the point. It is Canada that we are concerned about; it is decency and fair play in Canada that is important. We feel that one of the ways to establish that kind of Canada is to make sure that all our older and retired people have adequate security and justice.

I want to say this to the parliamentary secretary: he was obviously making his speech in the House of Commons, which is where we are between four and five o'clock on a Friday afternoon, but the speech was really directed to members of the Liberal caucus. I think I should say that apart from the zeal with which we press the whole question of making improvements in the old age pension, it is in the Liberal caucus that there is a growing and insistent demand for lowering the pensionable age to 60 and for increasing the amount of the pension. So it is his own colleagues he is going to have to persuade.

I submit that if he had made that speech in caucus and it had been followed by a free vote on the question, he would not have won. The Liberals as a whole still want to see the pensionable age lowered to 60, and they are still not satisfied with the basic pension being only \$100. I say to

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger).]

the parliamentary secretary that there is no point in trying to confuse us with figures.

• (1640)

He also begs the question a bit when he talks, as he did the other night and as he has done again today, about the cost of lowering the pensionable age to 60. Because he completely ignores the fact that most of us who advocate lowering the pensionable age to 60 also say that this should be done on a voluntary basis. In other worlds, we propose that the old age security and Canada Pension Plan payments be made to those between 60 and 65 who are either out of or are prepared to leave the labour market. I suggest, on that basis, that the total cost of such a program would be a lot less than he suggested it would be today or, indeed, than he suggested it would be in a late show response of his earlier this week.

The fact of the matter is that we are in the 70s, not in the 60s, 50s, 40s or 30s. We live in a decade when most Canadians feel that, the workaday world being the rat race it is and the problems people face being what they are, it is fair, reasonable and a matter of common sense to make retirement possible at age 60. Some people think that it should be at an even earlier age; no doubt that day will come.

Just saying that this is being considered along with everything else is not good enough. I submit that in the next election campaign all members of parliament who are running will have to face the question if we do not act on this question in the present parliament, "Why did you not bring the pensionable age down to 60?" Therefore I urge upon the parliamentary secretary and upon the government the realization that this issue will not die. There has not been as much talk about it in the last couple of months as there was during the debate on the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne or during the time we were considering amendments to the Old Age Security Act, but the issue is there. It is an important one and one that ought to be dealt with in the course of this parliament.

The hon. member for Compton includes in his motion the proposal that this apply both to old age security and to the Canada Pension Plan: That is my position as well. He also argues for a substantial increase in the basic amount of old age security. Some say that we are doing well in this area, that we have got the figure up to the round figure of \$100. But it is \$100 a month that we are talking about, not \$100 per week. People cannot exist on that, as we have recognized with the establishment of the guaranteed income supplement. There are thousands of people in this country—in fact, I figure about 30 per cent of the 1,800,000 who are 65 and over—who are in this in-between area where they have just enough income not to qualify for the guaranteed income supplement, and therefore do not get any of the fringe benefits that go with the guaranteed income supplement, but yet do not have enough to live on in decency and dignity.

In my view, the answer to this is still the answer that we made in 1950, namely that the basic amount of old age security should be paid on a universal basis, and that we should pay across the board now at least \$150 a month. I have just looked over the figures that the hon. member for Compton has suggested, and they seem to add up to \$200 a