from a speech made by the Hon. Member for Winnipeg North Centre, who said:

> What I like most of all about the Canada pension plan—about the two stage plan which we are now developing for Canadians in their years of retirement—is that we are trying to reach a position where we are providing pensions that are adequate. I do not suggest that the levels which will be achieved by combining the Canada pension plan, at its best, with old age security, at its present level, are really the last words in adequacy, but at least we are talking about pensions of quite a different order from that which seemed to be accepted a few years or decades ago. I hope that, having accepted the principle that retirement security should be on the basis of adequacy, we will go on improving that basis, finding ways and means of raising the levels of our pensions so that all Canadians can look forward to a retirement in decency and dignity.

I hope that all Members of the House can say Amen to that.

I have sat in this House and observed the Government on the other side for four years. Its Members have sat on their seats for four years, only to come up in the last few months with a paper which says, it is "A Time to Act". But that action is still off in a never-never land. The Government has waited a full four years before it has even begun to talk like a Liberal Government. Its members have been acting like Conservatives for four years and the Government has become increasingly unpopular. Members of the Liberal Government are still acting like Conservatives, but now that an election is approaching they are going to talk like Liberals. The last Budget was a classic example. It was Conservative economics and Liberals politics, the worst of both worlds.

We look to the Opposition for something different. But what do we have? We have the Hon. Member for St. John's West (Mr. Crosbie), the finance critic for the Conservative Party, who talks about having to be "mean and nasty" and having to do all kinds of things to people. He goes rambling off in long interviews with reporters from *The Globe and Mail* and from elsewhere. He says that he would like to think about introducing means tests for baby bonuses, family allowances, and maybe some of the other social measures but that this is not the time. That is what he said. The finance critic for the Conservative Party said this is not the time to introduce a means test for all those social programs.

I wish he were here because I would like to ask him, when is the time? Is it after an election, when we might be unfortunate enough to see a Conservative government acting like Conservatives instead of a Liberal government acting like Conservatives? Is that the appropriate time? My God, Mr. Speaker, we already have a Government in British Columbia composed of Liberals and Conservatives and some old Socreds who do not know the difference anymore. We have had lots of experience with them. They are the people who issued the cheques in April, 1984 who took away in spades the pitiful amount that was just passed on to those same pensioners by this federal Government in the last few weeks.

I want to address briefly in discussing this motion the whole question of a means test versus universality. I will conclude quickly. I am afraid, for all of the economic arguments—and there are some good ones although I think some short-sighted economic arguments may prevail, that we could introduce more means tests to a number of our social programs, including more of our pension systems. But if we do that, we will in effect cut off virtually everyone who is approaching the average industrial wage from receiving benefits. I would caution some of the more progressive Members on that side of the House that if we ever adopt such a regime, many of the workers in Canada, especially organized workers, for whom those of us who have had a chance to take some positions of leadership in the labour movement, who have been able to help keep on side in terms of social progress all the time, even sometimes at a cost to themselves, may well say, "We are paying a lion's share of taxes. How come we do not get any of the benefits? If you look at eligibility for the whole range of income related social program, federally and provincially, it is just below the average industrial wage where those cut-off lines always come into play either totally or in part. It would be the greatest disservice to social progress if we were ever to follow the very poor and poorly thought out advice for means tests rather than universality.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Any questions or comments relating to the Hon. Member's remarks?

• (1740)

Miss Aideen Nicholson (Trinity): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in this debate. Adequate pension benefits are important for all citizens, particularly women who until now have been the losers in many pension plans for reasons we all know.

In 1979, when the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) first started applying the federal Government's commitment to pension reform, a special emphasis was placed upon the particular problems facing women under the current pension system in Canada. Following the National Pensions Conference in 1981, a number of seminars were conducted by various women's groups across the country. The overwhelming participation of women in these seminars was a clear indication of their concern about the inadequacies of the pension system and their personal commitment to reform.

In December, 1982, with the release of the federal green paper on pension reform, an accompanying document called *Focus on Women* was released. Later, the parliamentary Special Committee on Pension Reform was requested by the Government to consult the public on those issues of specific concern to women. The Government's consistent commitment to today's elderly women and to future generations of women is a matter of public record since 1979. The extensive periods of study are now over. The February Budget of the Minister of Finance (Mr. Lalonde) left no doubt that improving the pension system for women is a priority of the Government in 1984.

Today, I would like to outline how and why the Government is intending to bring about much-needed pension reform, with particular emphasis upon those initiatives which will be of benefit to women. Let me begin with the public pension system, namely the old age security program and the Canada Pension Plan. These, of course, are the areas where the federal Government has the greatest authority. Under the old age