

*Social Development Ministry***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[English]

GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATION**ORDER IN COUNCIL RESPECTING ESTABLISHMENT OF
MINISTRY OF STATE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Pinard (for Mr. Trudeau):

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Governor General of Canada:

To His Excellency the Right Honourable Edward Richard Schreyer, Governor General and Commander-in-Chief of Canada:

May It Please Your Excellency:

The House of Commons, having considered the proposed text of the order in council tabled in the House on 21 April 1980, in relation to the establishment of a Ministry of State for Social Development, prays that the making of the said order in council be approved.

Mr. Joe Reid (St. Catharines): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to be able to rise in the House to speak to the order in council which has been submitted to us for approval. A Minister of State for Social Development has been badly needed for a number of years.

Together with my colleagues yesterday, I was very happy to take the trip back through the last two decades to the early 1960s. Because I remember them so well, I am sure I can say without giving offence that the theme song that was brought home to me was entitled, "But, Deary, You're So Much Older Than I." That is why in this world of politics I am looking to the future.

The world of politics is filled with band-aid, ad hoc remedies and that is why the former government made the decision and drafted an order in council to initiate such a department to give some long-term planning to the social and cultural needs of the Canadian people. I am very pleased that the present government has seen fit to reintroduce this order in much the same form.

A department for social justice, a department for social development, would quite obviously be instrumental in securing for all Canadians the conditions necessary for human justice and human fulfilment. But the spectrum of concerns which would flow within the general category of social development is so broad that one can easily understand the need for one agency which will be responsible for the long-term policy which may well outlive various governments and which is absolutely essential for ensuring fundamental human rights for Canadians of the future. We have seen all too many band-aid programs in the last decade.

● (1640)

I, for one, see some hope for the future in the proposed establishment of a social development department. I hope I am not proven to be too optimistic in that regard. More than any other ministry, this one will touch upon the aspects of government which directly affect the rights, the worth and the happiness of individual Canadians in their everyday lives. I believe the minister responsible should be one of the most

important people in cabinet. If issues such as old age security, pensions, employment, housing, women's rights, opportunities for the handicapped, poverty, health care, physical fitness and immigration are not government priorities in this country of ours, then what on earth are?

The spectrum of social development concerns is so broad that I have decided to concentrate my remarks on one important aspect, that is, policies regarding the elderly. That is the third stage of life which should be the golden age but for so many Canadians is not. Being somewhat close to the traditional retirement age myself, and feeling not in the least like being put out to pasture, I find myself becoming increasingly aware of that factor in life on which certainly happiness depends and which, I believe, falls into the category of a basic human right. I am speaking about choice. All too many Canadians upon approaching retirement age suddenly find the choice they have with respect to their lifestyle drastically changes and is curtailed. I am referring to the rights they have previously taken for granted to work, to be useful and productive in society, to earn a decent living and to receive a decent living. All of these things disappear far too quickly upon attaining age 65.

The question of choice naturally brings me to the subject of mandatory retirement. Surely in this age—and I hope in this decade—there should be more personal choice involved as to whether a person finishes his or her career upon attaining age 65. There are many factors involved, such as health, financial position, desire to continue work, ability to continue being productive, enjoyment of leisure, family situation and on and on. An automatic retirement age meets neither the needs of our economy nor the wants and needs of the majority of people.

For this reason our party had planned to devote particular attention to the question of retirement age in its review of the public and private pension plans of the country. The issue is arousing public concern both here in Canada and abroad. I see this as a demand on the part of the senior public sector to be able to exercise greater choice in terms of the decision to retire. As it stands, the individual does not have the right to choose. Human rights legislation leaves retirement policy to the employer, and employees are not protected against discrimination in employment or hiring practices after age 65. To me the key word in the resolution of this problem is "flexibility". Not everyone wants to work over age 65, which is their right and privilege. Not everyone is able to work beyond or even up to age 65 due to health problems or the difficulty of finding work. A 1975 survey by Statistics Canada showed that a full 37 per cent of men had retired by the age of 64, and nearly 70 per cent did so because of ill health or lay-offs. Fewer than one-third of these men had employer-sponsored pension schemes, systems or plans. Most were not eligible for the Canada Pension Plan because they were either not sick enough or old enough.

There is a category of workers who are mentally and physically able to continue working and, for any number of reasons, wish to continue doing so even after age 65, but these workers are forced into what for them is premature retirement.