

Supply—Health and Welfare

We acknowledge that we have done a great deal for those people, but I think too little acknowledgment is paid to the fact that of all the segments of our society it is those people who are benefiting least from the prosperous times in which we live.

The minister has made repeated references to the impressive figures as being an indication of what we are doing for those people, but I think he has given us very little of the other side of the picture, the increased revenues of this government, the piling up of surpluses and the increased cost of living. Might I just remind the minister that in the year 1952 the Canadian population was some 14,430,000 persons, the gross national product in millions was 23,255. On a per capita basis that wealth was distributed amongst all persons in Canada to the extent of \$1,615. In 1955 the Canadian population was some 15,881,000, the gross national product in millions was 26,600, which means that on a per capita basis the distribution of the wealth amounted to \$1,673. I feel that the increase in wealth in this country ought to be made available by an increased pension to these people.

I think there is a great deal of significance in the tone of the debate that has been carried on with respect to those people. All members are in agreement, and I think that opinion prevails throughout our country, certainly amongst all who recognize we have a solemn responsibility toward this segment of our society. Therefore, I believe, Mr. Chairman, that the minister, having all these compelling facts in front of him, knowing the situation as he does and supported by the unanimous opinion of this house and of the country, should not be timid in insisting that those who are in opposition to an increased pension at this time reverse their opinions and make such pension increases available now.

I had no intention of taking part in this debate. This morning I received a very interesting address made by Robert B. Meyner, governor of New Jersey, which was delivered at the national conference on problems of the ageing in Washington on June 5, 1956. The theme of his address was the re-evaluation by our society of the entire concept of old age. The address is entitled, "The Rights of our Senior Citizens". I think it has a definite message and is timely at this time, and I should like to quote from it as follows:

I am reminded of a story found in a poem about a Mr. Arrents, who was the father of seven children. Mr. Arrents worked hard all of his life to feed, clothe and educate his children. Once in a while throughout these hard-working years, Mr. Arrents would sit back and muse about that one fine day when he would be able to relax and enjoy life—to retire and, so to speak, live off his children. Time passed. The children grew up and left home. "Ah", Mr. Arrents now said to himself.

"The time has come to retire. The children," he said, "are all making a good living. Now let them support me in my autumn days as I cared for them for so many years".

And so, he called on each of his seven children. But from each one came the same answer: "Honestly, pop, I just can't do it."

Then, Mr. Arrents turned and went back to the task of finding support for himself. As he did, Mr. Arrents was struck by the ironic thought that it seemed to be much easier for one parent to support seven children, than it was for seven children to support one parent.

In a symbolic way, each of us today is one of those seven children. For like them, we have been unable, for one reason or another, to care properly for a vast army of older parents and grandparents, many of whom played a great role in caring for us. We have neglected, instead, this vast population of older people, many of whom, because of our neglect, are living lives that are isolated, lonely and useless.

Just one more matter, Mr. Chairman; I would appreciate hearing from the minister what consideration has been given to reducing the residence requirements of those citizens, who are Canadian citizens, who have reached the age of 70 years and yet are unable to qualify for a pension. What consideration has been given to reducing the residence requirements of those people? It seems to me the moment that anyone becomes a Canadian citizen he has certain definite responsibilities. The least we can do is to at least make available to them the privilege of being a Canadian citizen by reducing the residence requirements of the aged persons. Would the minister care to comment on that?

Mr. Hellyer: Mr. Chairman, I would just like to say a word on that subject if I might and ask the minister to reconsider the matter of the residence requirement. As the hon. member who just sat down said, these people come to this country and many of them make an excellent contribution to its welfare over a considerable period. Their children take on where they leave off and produce and pull their fair share of the load in making this a better and more prosperous place in which to live. Even if we cannot eliminate the residence requirement perhaps it could be reduced to 15 or 10 years in order to give these people a little additional help and comfort in their later years. Many of them have lived very deeply overseas and suffered hardship and some of them cruelty and their children often bring them here to enjoy the later years of their lives in a country where they can worship and live in freedom. I think it is a matter which is worthy of serious consideration and I urge upon the minister that he give it his kind attention in the months that lie ahead and perhaps at some future time introduce an amendment that would take care of the situation.