

Guaranteed Minimum Income

that we must expect a certain amount of loss which is to be written off. I refuse to write off any human being.

If a person is capable of being retrained and improving his position, we should concentrate on this instead of putting him on pension. People should receive a pension if they are old or ill: no one argues against that. However, if they are capable of joining the labour force, jobs should be available for them. The situation is something like motherhood. Motherhood can be a great joy and blessing, but it can also be a curse. Excessive motherhood can be an excessive curse.

We have to be careful with all these programs. I might not have said some of these things 20 years ago when we lived in a society which was very much work-oriented. We had a strong Calvinist tradition. That is changing. Our society is not as work-oriented as it once was. To say that we can depend on the work motive to overcome people choosing welfare rather than work is less true today than it was years ago. It is good that it is less true today. In my time we were too work-oriented; we were inclined to say that work was an end in itself rather than a part of life.

The situation is more difficult today. At one time work had some meaning. People took pride and satisfaction in the creativity of work. This is becoming more and more difficult in our modern society when we push buttons or file fenders as they go by on an assembly line. Work is just plain, dogged hard. A person receives little joy or satisfaction from standing in an assembly line eight hours a day working in tune and in time with machinery. The young people today want meaningful work. Who can blame them? They want work in which they can express themselves. While they have the desire for more expression and meaning, work is becoming less and less that way. There are fewer and fewer opportunities for people to develop and express themselves within the context of the factory system.

Another structure is developing in our society of which we must be aware. There are classes in every society, although many people would like to ignore this fact. The traditional class has been the working man against the entrepreneur. There have been classes of religion against religion, race against race, free trader against protectionist and resource industries against manufacturers. We have always had these groups.

We now have another group which is overlaying our whole traditional structure. At the first level of this group are the young, those who are attending school and not yet in the labour market. There are more and more of these people. They are staying in school for longer and longer periods of time. At the other end of the scale are the old. There are also more of them. As we improve our approach to medicine and science there are more opportunities for people to live longer and enjoy life more.

In the middle is the group that has to pay for both ends. That group is becoming relatively small in comparison with the one at the beginning and the one at the end. There is a limit to what this group is prepared to bear in the way of taxation at any given time. This is something that we must face. I wish this group would be

[Mr. Saltsman.]

willing to pay for anything we want, but there is a constraint. We have been lavishing far more of our resources on the young than the old.

Our old people are getting short-changed. We must do something about this situation. Young people are remaining in school beyond the point of real education or training. They are kept off the labour market because the government has not been able to solve simple economic problems such as providing employment opportunities. They are being kept in cold storage, which is very expensive. They are being kept in school beyond any real necessity for keeping them there. If we had all the resources in the world, and if the question of cost and resources was not involved, we could say "So what" and let them stay there as long as they like. However, if in order to keep them there we let the position of the older people, the poor and the sick deteriorate, we are wrong. The young have many years ahead of them. Those at the other end of the spectrum have only a limited time. To say that we will solve the problem 20 years from now is of no use to them. They are entitled to our consideration and compassion. The old are entitled to a fair distribution of the wealth of our society.

We are faced with a very great problem in the sense that we live in a society that has wealth side by side with indescribable poverty. This is our shame. Something must be done about it. My plea is that if we decide to do something about this situation, we do not go for slogans, fancy language or forms that have appeal but we take a hard and realistic look at the problem. We must develop our resources in order to provide full employment. If not, we will not do very much. We must concentrate on sound economic policies, something which this government has not done for the past few years. Once we have sound economic policies, we must make a value judgment of their importance in order to help the old and sick in our society who are most in need of our compassion.

● (5:50 p.m.)

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (St. Boniface): Mr. Speaker, I should like to begin my remarks on this subject by commenting on certain observations made by the hon. member for Waterloo (Mr. Saltsman). I do not believe it is necessary to go back almost three years, when this government came to power, to demonstrate the concern it has shown for those in receipt of the old age pension and those who have to live on low incomes generally.

Within the last few months the government has brought in legislation pertaining to a guaranteed income supplement. Old age security benefits have been increased, veterans pensions and allowances have been increased and increases in unemployment insurance benefits are, of course, currently under discussion in the House. Changes designed to benefit many people are being undertaken in the family allowance program, and the Senate, through one of its committees, is currently considering this aspect of the subject.

[Translation]

However I would like to refer to the remarks made by the hon. member for Portneuf (Mr. Godin). In fact, the