

Old Age Security

lady living in the suburbs of a city, a small town or on a farm in a genteel or decent form of poverty. Our senior citizens should have an adequate income with which to meet and cover their needs; their income should not only be adequate for their bread and butter. These people have worked hard to build our society and they did not receive very much income for so doing. We received the benefits. Our senior citizens are not given the proper credit for their basic pioneering in this country.

We often take these things for granted. We feel that because we live in a modern, affluent age we deserve all these things. We sometimes feel that because our older people did not earn very much in their working days, they do not deserve a good pension. I take issue with those who hold that view and do not want to provide an adequate pension for senior citizens. Those who built the basic framework for our society have a claim on us. That claim should not be equated to a dollar value on what they put into society. Anyone in business realizes that the basic capital invested in a community increases once the society is in gear. We must give recognition to these people in an economic sense. They should have adequate incomes to enable them to live with a feeling of decency and worth. We disagree with the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro). He does not recognize the basic fact that our citizens have contributed more than is recorded in dollars and cents.

I wish to spend a few moments speaking of some of the individuals in my constituency. I feel it is better to talk about individuals than to quote statistics. We must consider the problems of those people who have farmed for most of their lives, moved into a small village adjacent to their farm and turned over the operation of the farm to their son. They may have an adequate house in the village, and possibly a little money. In addition, they may have an old car. Their life is not too bad so long as they are able to drive that car. But times are changing in Canada. Perhaps the villages no longer have a store. Many do not have a doctor, druggist or hospital. People must go elsewhere for these services. As long as they are able to drive, the situation is not too bad. If they become incapacitated and are no longer able to drive, they are in trouble. They may decide that the village is not adequate and decide to move to a larger town.

When they try to purchase a home in the larger town, they find it is beyond their resources to do so. Because they are not able to sell their house in the small village at a good price, they do not have the capital with which to purchase a house in a larger village. Therefore, they decide to rent an apartment. They find that rents are out of all reason compared with the income on which they have been used to managing. Inflation has cut into their savings. Now they are faced with an extremely difficult problem. They need to be near medical services and they want to be close to older people like themselves. Yet when they try to move, their resources prove inadequate.

● (5:40 p.m.)

The increases which have been announced are not sufficient to take care of these needs. In some cases, it is

[Mr. Thomson.]

true, there may be children capable of assisting their parents. This is all to the good; perhaps today we pass too many of our family responsibilities on to the state. But in other cases children will not accept this responsibility or, possibly, they do not have the necessary means. When these old people move into a community where rents are high, they find that when they have paid their rent they are left with insufficient money to take care of other necessities.

I recall talking with elderly people who are extremely conscious of transportation costs. They were used to getting 20 tickets for a dollar. Now, in Ottawa, it costs 25 cents or 30 cents to travel on a bus, and most elderly people travel by bus. Expenses such as these—minor expenses to most of us—are important to elderly people, especially if they wish to take part in such activities for older people as our society provides.

I think of some railroaders in the town of Biggar near my home who were hardworking, industrious people. They saved money and bought a house. They receive a pension. But the pension is nowhere near adequate to their needs today. They were saving money back in the thirties and forties when a dollar went quite a long way. That is not the case today. Their taxes have gone up; the cost of food has risen and the cost of new articles, when they have to buy them, bears no relation to the provision they were able to make for themselves. So they are caught in a squeeze. I am not talking about people who, like the grasshopper in the fable, preferred to be idle. I am talking about industrious people who saved and used their resources with care but who, because of the changing times, are not able to meet the problems which surround them today.

When I look at these people and see the arrangements they have tried to make, I cannot but feel we ought to consider them a little more as individuals and a little less as statistics. I am sure that if the Minister of National Health and Welfare were to go out and talk to these people, he would also relate to them in this way. He is no more heartless than the rest of us. Sometimes, here in Ottawa, dealing with millions of dollars and problems of statistics we forget that somewhere out there is a person. We must look at this question less impersonally.

I do not wish to belabour the subject. I feel we can do better than we have done. I liked the suggestion made by one hon. member who preceded me that we ought to consider this subject again in a year or two. I do not think we are dealing with it adequately now. If this is all we can do at the moment, we had better not wait too long before we take another look at this problem, because inflation is constantly with us and unless we do something about bringing rents into line with the ability of people to afford them, the problem will become more acute rather than less. It behoves us to look after elderly people in a better fashion than we have done so far.

Mr. John Burton (Regina East): Mr. Speaker, I feel I must speak up in this debate in defence of the elderly people in my constituency of Regina East and in defence of elderly people wherever they may live in Canada. In