

Mr Frederick FUNG moved the following motion: (Translation)

"That this Council endorses the Report on Elderly in Poverty by the Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty and urges the Government to implement the recommendations therein."

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): I now propose the question to you and that is: That the motion moved by Mr Frederick FUNG be passed.

PRESIDENT (in Cantonese): Mrs Selina CHOW will move an amendment to this motion. The motion and the amendment will now be debated together in a joint debate.

I now call upon Mrs Selina CHOW to speak and move her amendment to the motion.

MRS SELINA CHOW (in Cantonese): I believe everyone is very clear that Hong Kong is now facing an ageing population problem and Mr Frederick FUNG has elaborated on this just now. Besides, I am sure that the poverty problem arising from an ageing population is also our great concern.

According to the latest figures of the Social Welfare Department (SWD), there are as many as 152 810 CSSA cases concerning the elderly, accounting for 52% of Hong Kong's total CSSA cases, which stands at 293 952. At present, the number of CSSA recipients aged 60 or above is 187 050, accounting for 36% of the 516 000-odd CSSA recipients in Hong Kong. Besides, there are lots of elderly in poverty who would rather live on the monthly fruit grant of a few hundred dollars than applying for CSSA.

(THE PRESIDENT'S DEPUTY, MS MIRIAM LAU, took the Chair)

As we all know, many elders would not hesitate to eke a living out of collecting cartons in the street. According to a recent report, a hunchbacked

woman scavenger was killed by a car when dashing to the opposite side of a road through a row of cars for picking up a piece of cartoon. It is indeed saddening. Recently, there is another report about an underground scavengers' syndicate in Tuen Mun and Yuen Long which has been competing fiercely with the elderly scavengers. All these make us aware that quite a lot of elders are leading a miserable life in their twilight years.

It is projected that the population aged 65 or above will increase to 27% in 2033. In other words, there will be an elder aged 65 or above in every four citizens and the median age will also rise to 49. The elderly dependency ratio, which means the ratio between every 1 000 people aged 15 to 64 and those aged 65 and above, will also increase from 164 in 2005 to 428 in 2033.

I have cited the above figures and phenomena to illustrate a fact, and that is, the ageing population problem in Hong Kong is worsening, possibly putting a heavier burden on society. The Legislative Council's Subcommittee to Study the Subject of Combating Poverty (the Subcommittee) has also noted the seriousness of the elderly in poverty problem and completed a report recently in which 25 measures have been proposed with a view to preventing and alleviating the problem of elderly in poverty.

As a member of the Subcommittee, I very much agree that the weak and distressed elders should be helped by society. Most of the proposals in the report are also strongly supported by the Liberal Party in principle. For instance, in item (c), it is proposed that the Portable CSSA Scheme be extended to all places outside Hong Kong instead of confining its applicability only to Guangdong and Fujian Provinces as currently is the case. This proposal will not only provide convenience to the elderly who wish to spend their retirement life in their hometown in the Mainland but also set their minds at ease.

Another example is the proposal on streamlining the application procedures for medical fee waiver and extending the waiver to Chinese medicine consultation. We cannot agree more because the elderly are more vulnerable to illnesses and most of them either place trust in Chinese medical practitioners or are used to patronizing them. The proposal can meet the needs of the elderly and alleviate their burden in medical expenses.

However, the Liberal Party opines that the Government should make better use of resources in order to help the needy elderly in view of an ageing

population and dramatic increase in social welfare expenditure. If welfare is distributed to all people in a non-discriminatory manner regardless of their needs or wealth, it will only increase our burden and even the next generation's. Precisely because of this, the Liberal Party strongly objects to the three proposals in the report. Next I will mainly explain why our views are different.

Regarding the Subcommittee's proposal of reviewing and relaxing the requirement for elders to apply for CSSA on a household basis, the Liberal Party disagrees with this because CSSA has all along used a household as a basis for application and such a practice implies that the family members should take care of each other. Should there be any change to this requirement, it will lead to abuse and encourage the children not to support their parents in a disguised manner. This is not conducive to family harmony. According to the figures cited by me just now, however, the elderly on CSSA account for more than half of the CSSA case, showing that the needy elderly will not be turned away under the current system.

Besides, in item (t) of the report concerning the review of the arrangement for offsetting the long service payment or severance payment by the accrued benefits derived from the contribution of employers made for his/her employees to MPF schemes, the Liberal Party also disagrees because such an offsetting mechanism has been implemented and operating for years in a satisfactory manner. Moreover, the current *modus operandi* was a consensus reached by all parties concerned then as well as an important rationale of the Government in convincing the employers to participate in MPF schemes. If the rules of the game are changed now, the employers will have to make much more contributions in a disguised form. As this will lead to a tremendous increase in their burden which is unfair to them, so I believe this will arouse great repercussions.

Concerning item (u) which urges the Government to consider providing universal retirement protection for the elderly, the Liberal Party also objects. As we have implemented the MPF schemes under which both the employees and employers are making contributions for the purpose of providing retirement protection to more than 2.4 million employees, it will only lead to confusion if a new proposal is introduced. Furthermore, we had engaged in vigorous disputes and debates on the form of retirement protection before reaching a consensus of implementing the MPF instead of a universal retirement protection scheme on consideration of fairness and the possibility of leading to a heavy burden on our next generation.

Let me cite another example. The Joint Alliance for Universal Retirement Protection has proposed that a monthly old-age pension payment of \$2,500 or \$3,000 be paid to all elderly aged 65 or above regardless of their wealth and without vetting, apart from another suggestion that half of the MPF assets be contributed by the 2 million-odd wage earners in the territory for the setting up of a universal retirement protection scheme. Is this not tantamount to requiring these wage earners to contribute their own hard-earned assets for the support of other people's retirement life? Will the MPF contributors consider such a scheme equitable? If another set of MPF schemes is to be launched, can they afford it?

Deputy President, as I said at the beginning of my speech, the Liberal Party agrees that the population ageing problem in Hong Kong has become very serious and the elderly who have worked very hard when young and made a lot of contribution to society should be taken good care of when they are old. In particular, those who are unable to care for themselves or not supported by their children should be helped by society. We support that appropriate help and protection in various forms should be given to the needy elderly according to their actual needs. Thus, we agree that the monthly allowance under the CSSA and Social Security Allowance Schemes should be reviewed to see if it is sufficient to ensure that the elderly who have devoted half a lifetime for Hong Kong can lead a happy life in their twilight years without any worry about their living.

Deputy President, I so submit.

Mrs Selina CHOW moved the following amendment: (Translation)

"To add "based on the principle of helping those who are genuinely in need, and not to consider the following three recommendations: (a) reviewing and relaxing the requirement for elders to apply for Comprehensive Social Security Allowance on a household basis; (b) reviewing the arrangement for offsetting the long service payment or severance payment by the accrued benefits derived from the contribution of the employers made to his/her employees in the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes; and (c) considering providing a universal retirement protection for the elderly" immediately before the full stop."