

Old Age Security Act Amendment

Mr. MacEachen: Hon. gentlemen opposite, especially the hon. member for Timiskaming (Mr. Peters) and the hon. lady from Vancouver-Kingsway, have been eager to put their correspondence from old age pensioners on the record, and the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has constantly referred to the fact that he has scores of letters from old age pensioners who are saying in a united chorus that the approach the government is taking is wrong. Well, that is their correspondence. I have had correspondence from old age pensioners and I would like to read a paragraph from one of the letters because it underlines the point that I have been making up to this moment. The first sentence is flattering but I do not read it for that purpose.

My wife and I send you our congratulations on your personal perseverance in presenting . . . the increase of \$30 a month. As my wife and I are in our 70 year bracket and (get) \$150 for us both, I can tell you it has been hard sledding, but the fact that neither of us smoke or drink was a big factor in getting along.

Referring to this legislation, the writer says:

This, in my mind, is the only legislation where the poor gets more and the rich gets nothing.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear.

Mr. MacEachen: "Where the poor gets more and the rich gets nothing" is the defence for the approach that the government is taking, the approach that no hon. member has tackled on its merits in the course of this debate. I say it is important that the government and Canadian society maintain some equilibrium, some equity between our responsibilities to the taxpayers and our responsibilities to the older people, and I repeat again that the guaranteed income approach provided for in this legislation achieves the most judicious and realistic balance between these important responsibilities.

As I noted earlier, Mr. Speaker, and I put it on the record again, in 1967 this program will cost taxpayers approximately \$100 million less than the least costly of the alternatives put forward by members of the opposition. Yet despite that feature of this legislation, because taxes are being raised to finance it, the tax raising process has been bitterly denounced by hon. members this very evening. This variation in the cost will increase as time goes on, as more and more Canadians become eligible for higher and higher benefits under the Canada and Quebec pension plans. Indeed, by 1970 the cost of the guaranteed income supplement will be almost \$200 million less than

the flat-rate increase advocated by members of the official opposition.

Hon. members opposite have criticized this proposal because it is a transitional program and, notwithstanding its inadequacies, they have urged that the program not be transitional but that it be applied in perpetuity, that it be made to apply forever. All I can say in reply to that argument is that the government accepts the recommendation made to it by the joint Senate and House of Commons committee.

That committee, of which the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre was a most vocal and active member, recommended that some additional form of income maintenance be made available to those persons who, because of age, could not benefit in full or could benefit only in part from the Quebec and Canada pension plans, and the purpose of this legislation is to put into effect the recommendation of that joint committee with respect to this specific identifiable group.

Mr. Knowles: That was not the only recommendation.

Mr. MacEachen: Well, this is the recommendation that is being put into effect by the legislation before us tonight.

Mr. Knowles: But you ignored the other one, which was more important.

Mr. MacEachen: Mr. Speaker, there is one other point that I would like to cover in some detail, and it is the subject matter of the amendment that is now before the house on the third reading of the bill. This is the question of the income criteria used to determine the level of benefits under this program.

Hon. members opposite have done, in the word of the hon. member for Nanaimo-Cowichan-The Islands (Mr. Cameron), their disingenuous best to distort this feature of the program and to spread what I regard as false fears among the older people of Canada. The hollowness and the hypocrisy of the amendment that the house is now asked to deal with—and I repeat the word "hypocrisy"—are clearly exposed when one compares the comments of the N.D.P. in December with those of last June.

I have already placed on the record the statements made by the hon. member for York South (Mr. Lewis), and it might be appropriate to remind the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre of the summertime romance that the deputy leader of the N.D.P. carried