

Old Age Security Act

benefit in Canada, including OAS, GIS and CPP, is about the same as that for a single person in the United States, but much higher than that for a married couple. Minimum benefits are higher in Canada than in France, and food costs in France are about 60 per cent higher than in Canada. There are no minimum benefits under the West German program with which to compare Canadian pensions, but Canadian maximum benefits are lower than those in West Germany. However, food costs in Germany were about 100 per cent higher than those in Canada.

From these rough comparisons—and I admit that these are rough comparisons—it can be concluded that minimum benefits for the aged in Canada are higher than those provided in the United States, the United Kingdom, France or Sweden. With the measure that is before the House today, this government has kept Canada in the forefront of the countries of the western world in providing income security for older people. I am particularly proud to be part of a government and of a political party that have made sure over the years that Canada would not only keep that lead over the other countries, but would increase it.

• (1610)

Mr. Heath Macquarrie (Hillsborough): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to follow the minister. His modesty varied in reverse proportion to the modesty of his proposals. Not only did he reach back through time but extended his comparison through space to every country with the exception of Australia. He said we were incomparable. This remark struck me. It is a remark which emanates so often from people in the minister's party. It is suggested again that the Liberal party uniquely shows its great concern for the plight of the aged people in Canada, that the members of that party alone hold a monopoly on concern and that they and they alone care. This is the party of the "six-buck boys" which had the effrontery to go to the country in 1968, on an increase of 42 cents a month. Then, I see that there is the old refrain that they have "effectively banished poverty for persons of over 65 years of age". Then, there is the familiar refrain, "You never had it so good". I am sure the aged of Canada will note that they have been told how generous the government has been and how amply it has met their needs in a country which under this administration has been facing grinding and groaning inflation year after year. I should like to say to the minister that this party will support Bill C-147—

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Macquarrie:—not with the ecstasy which some have already expressed, but because it is the best available and is the best we are likely to get from this government so long as it clings to power. I shall go a little further than that and say that, although in my view it is much less pretentious than the minister seems to think, we will be glad to expedite its passage. If it is agreeable to the other parties, we will field one spokesman, namely myself, and move on to the veterans legislation. But this offer is made with wide-open eyes. I remember very well what happened during the debate on the estimates when we ended

[Mr. Lalonde.]

up by creating an oratorical vacuum for government supporters on this side of the House and elsewhere. If the agreement is such, we will stick by it and do our best in committee, although there may be witnesses who might like to come to the committee and testify as to how grateful they are that all their needs have been met. Later on in my remarks I will indicate why I feel tepidity rather than enthusiasm for this particular measure.

It is the first bill the minister has brought forward and it is a custom in parliamentary circles to congratulate ministers when they present their first legislative infant to the baptismal font, and I do that with sincerity. I have already congratulated the minister upon proceeding from the back room to the green chamber. I have reflected on this of late. When I see that so many princes from the Prime Minister's palace have gone into limbo I feel that his survival is pretty remarkable. Practically all are gone save he. We look around and see that the felled princes have been succeeded by the fallen politicians, and I am told it is the only palace in the world where the old guard is replaced by a still older guard. In the light of this legislation, whether the minister's move was fateful rather than fatal time alone will tell. All the leaks we had heard and noted, and all the thought waves from commentators in recent weeks and months as well as the vibrations from the inner sancta and writings of eminent journalists, indicated we would be looking at a figure of \$125 today. Who cut that figure down? Was it the President of the Treasury Board (Mr. Drury); was it the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner)? Surely, it was not the spokesman for the junior partnership in this alliance for perpetrated power, the New Democratic Party, because its figure is \$150.

However, the \$125 figure is not before us today. I wonder what thwarted the minister's \$125 plan? Some day when we are all gone, some student will peruse the archives and will find out. Today, we can probably surmise with reasonable accuracy. While it is the custom to congratulate the father of a bill, I am in a difficult situation today because this bill has two fathers, a difficult situation biologically but not impossible politically. The Leader of the New Democratic Party (Mr. Lewis) said there would not have been a pension increase to \$100 if the New Democratic Party had not insisted on it. I ask, what in heaven's name the increase would have been had the government been left alone. Had the junior partner not moved in, would there have been an increase of \$6 or would it have been 42 cents? I look forward to hearing from my venerable and beloved friend, the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles), because I know he called for \$150. He is getting \$100. Yet it seems, despite the fact that the figure is not \$150 but rather \$100—this cherished figure is gone—he is going to support an incompetent and insensitive government on the strength of not \$150 but \$100. Many things will be said about the distinguished member for Winnipeg North Centre, but it may not be said that he was particularly hard to satisfy.

This is certainly an important piece of legislation. It was presented today in unusually partisan terms for this kind of legislation. I simply state that the political and parliamentary structure in this country make it all the more important that the Canadian people, especially the Canadian elderly people, should take particular note of