

Old Age Security Act Amendment

There is a further argument against this bill in its present form. The means test involved in the bill will require the employment of hundreds of clerks to keep track of those who may receive supplementary assistance and those who will not receive it. If the assistance had taken the form of a flat rate increase, further expense would not be required, and the matter would have been looked after by the present staff. No one knows what the cost of administration in respect of this legislation will be except that it will be very high. Why not divert these high costs directly to the aged citizens of Canada for their direct use and benefit?

Last Thursday I was amused by the remarks of the Minister of Transport when he interrupted a speaker to ask where the government could have saved \$100 million in this year's budget. He also asked whether it was thought that the amount of money to be used for old age security is unlimited. I say to him that \$100 million could have been saved on just three or four items—in the defence department, on the many royal commissions that this government has sponsored, on the squandering of taxpayers' funds, and on the policy of bilingualism and biculturalism which has cost this country more than \$500 million. It seems that this government is very willing to throw money around lavishly on these things. This bill indicates that there is little or no disposition on the part of the government to help the rank and file of old age pensioners in this country. Their priority is at the bottom of the heap.

There is another facet in connection with this bill which encourages laziness. It has been ably pointed out by the hon. member for Argenteuil-Deux-Montagnes (Mr. Régimbal). If a pensioner is industrious and earns a little money he is penalized and will not receive the full supplement. But a pensioner who sits on the verandah and does nothing will receive the maximum if he can pass the Pearson-MacEachen test. How ridiculous can the government make itself look. What a laughing stock it will be. There will be a big field for the cartoonists. This legislation will also cause jealousy, controversy and trouble between neighbours. One man will hear that another receives more pension than he and then there will be trouble.

No doubt there will be many injustices attached to this legislation if it passes. There will be many instances of unrecorded income. In many localities across the country you will find senior citizens who cannot qualify for the

[Mr. Alkenbrack.]

additional supplement because they cannot pass the means test. This will be the case if the person earns just \$60 a month. In this case he will receive no supplement at all. Then there will be the neighbour who qualifies. This neighbour is able to obtain a little employment and earn \$60 a month or more but if it is unreported he will get \$105 a month plus the extra he earns. On the other hand, the first-mentioned pensioner still has to subsist on the \$75 a month. This bill is nothing but a generator of inequalities. Do not worry, Mr. Speaker. It will be self-induced. People are not dumb; they will not always report every-thing.

Most hon. members must agree that this bill will not serve the needs of the majority of the older people of Canada. It is too little, too late. There is another point I should like to make. Is the government going to administer the supplementary payments? This government has no field workers but we know that the provinces have. If the answer to the question is no, then the provincial governments will be asked to do this. I contend that this would be nothing but an imposition on the provinces. Even if the answer is that it is going to be handled through the Canada Pension Plan offices, nevertheless field workers will still be required to go out to investigate these cases. A flat universal supplement is by far the best thing for the pensioners and for the country as a whole, if the recipients who are better off pay their pensions back in the form of income tax. This has been pointed out by many hon. members before me.

I was glad to hear the hon. member for York East (Mr. Otto) say that the need for this bill could have been eliminated. Certainly it could have been. It could have been done simply by amending the existing act by the addition of a flat rate universal increase for all recipients.

● (9:00 p.m.)

There is one more point I want to make on behalf of the senior citizens of this country, and it relates to the increasing cost of rent and lodgings. Let me refer to an item which appeared in the *Kingston Whig-Standard* of December 8, 1966. The headline reads "Food Prices Down, Housing up". Part of the article reads as follows:

Rents, home-owner repairs, property taxes, furniture, textiles, utensils and most supplies and services were heavier burdens on the householder.

The article had reference to October of 1966, which is not too long ago.