

increase in old age pensions. The problem of the pensioner in Canada is similar to problems faced by many other groups in this country, many of them powerless or underprivileged. These are the working poor, the unemployed and those on fixed incomes of one sort or another. If we are to give all these people an equal opportunity, we must have changes. The pensioner should not have to worry about money; he should have an income that enables him to live in dignity and to have all the services that are necessary in today's society.

We do not give these things top priority in Canada; that rating seems to fall to money, profits and the interests of our corporate society. In this country we seem to follow the philosophy of survival of the fittest. This means that the weak person, the older person, the person who for some reason or other may not have a skill or education, is pushed aside and trampled upon. This bill reinforces that philosophy. This bill does not redistribute wealth; it redistributes poverty. It takes from some of the poor who are a little more affluent, to give to the really poor. This might clear the conscience of a few people in the Liberal party or a few of the privileged people in Canada, but it will not put much buying power into the pockets of the old people.

There are a number of reasons why we have to take this question more seriously. As I said before, our old people laid the foundations of this country. The country is only 103 years old and many of those receiving the old age pension today are first generation Canadians. They came from all around the world to look for greater opportunity, and indeed many of them found it. But now that they are old they find themselves faced with living in conditions of absolute and abject poverty, when they have a right to dignity and comfort. They are not asking for a pension that is extravagant or that will allow them to live in luxury; all they are asking is that they receive the basics to enable them to live in dignity.

It is the duty of members of this House to convince the government that it must do these things; and if we cannot, we must change the government. We know the resources of this country. We are one of the wealthiest nations in the world, and we have the technology and scientific know-how to make that wealth work for the people. We can transplant hearts and we can go to the moon, but still 20 per cent of our people live below the poverty line. The whole thing does not make much sense to me, Mr. Speaker, and it makes even less sense to the old person who has to live on hand-outs in a house that is cold and not fit for habitation. I again appeal to the Minister of National Health and Welfare to reconsider this bill and to come down, on the side of the people, with sound legislation that will make us all proud of him.

Mr. Mark Smerchanski (Provencher): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few remarks on Bill C-202. It has been said that the increase is 42 cents a month. Of course, that is not so, because with the pension supplement a single person will receive \$135 a month and a married couple will receive \$255 a month. Perhaps the pension supplement should be higher, but on the other

Old Age Security

hand I think the government should be congratulated on the proposals contained in this bill. Based on a 40-hour week, the government has increased the pension rate for a married person to \$1.50 an hour. That is an excellent proposition and is, I think, a major step in the right direction.

Many times in this chamber we have heard members state that they would like to get industry into their areas. The workers in their areas would be happy to receive \$1.50 per hour. The pension supplement, based on \$255 per month, works out to \$1.50 per hour. The only unfair part of this proposal is that the recipients will be taxed under the present income tax arrangement. When the proposals in the white paper on taxation are implemented next year, single persons receiving \$135 a month, and married couples receiving \$255 per month, will not be taxed. As with any program, everyone would like a little more money to spend. However, there must be a reasonable equivalent between the tax proceeds of the government and what it has to pay out. Some people in our society have a very heavy tax burden. It is not fair to require these people to pay additional taxes in order to hand out this money to others.

● (5:30 p.m.)

The program proposed in Bill C-202 will assist the senior citizens. We must bear in mind that there are also other programs for these people, such as medicare. The provinces have a well-integrated and well-planned system by which some senior citizens enjoy additional benefits. I repeat that if the pension supplement is worked out on an hourly basis, it averages \$1.50 per hour. If all employed Canadians received \$1.50 per hour, taxes could be reduced in this country. It is only one side of the coin to state that this increase works out to 42 cents per hour. It should be brought to the attention of our senior citizens that they are receiving fair and equitable treatment.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Smerchanski: The pension supplement for single people will be increased to \$135 per month, and \$255 per month for married couples. We must also consider the places in which our retired senior citizens live. Those living in a rural area may have a garden, chickens and possibly cows which provide their milk and butter. If they receive \$1.50 an hour, this is a good income. The opposition is being unfair when they say that the government is not providing enough. The assistance proposed in this bill is fair and equitable. I agree that more can be done. Possibly in another year or two we will have to reconsider this whole matter. In the meantime, the government should be complimented for having introduced this good program. The senior citizens of Canada will be in a much better position as a result of it.

Mr. Rod Thomson (Battleford-Kindersley): When we think of some of our elderly people on pension, Mr. Speaker, we are sometimes inclined to think of an old