

promise to increase the old age pension and the guaranteed income supplement to take care of the increase in the cost of living. When the hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe speaks about an increase in the old age pension to \$400 a month for a couple, I think he should remember what his leader was saying during the election campaign.

Let me now say a few words about the speech made by the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton in which he was critical of the New Democratic Party provincial governments because they had not raised the rates for welfare or social allowances. I agree with him that the rates for welfare in all provinces should be higher than they are, but in making those remarks he was comparing apples with oranges. We are not here to discuss the rates paid to those people who need assistance in the provinces, though I am prepared to discuss that on another occasion and to agree that the rates are too low in all provinces. I am not very happy about that. We are here to discuss the rates of assistance in the form of old age pensions or guaranteed income supplements or provincial supplements to those people who are 65 years of age or older. The hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton did not put on the record that in the province of British Columbia every single person 65 years of age and over gets a minimum income, guaranteed by the province, of \$200 a month. In other words, whatever their income is from other sources, if it is less than \$200 the province brings it up to that figure. I think the record should be clear and the hon. member should not have confused it as he did, though perhaps inadvertently.

Mr. Cullen: A point of order, Mr. Chairman. I know the hon. member wants to be fair. It was my intention to make reference to that extra \$50 and criticize it, because it goes against N.D.P. policy of universality. It seems to me that all the old age pensioners in Canada should be in a similar situation, rather than being better off in one province than in another.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Chairman, we are talking about a floor, a minimum. We have never said that everybody should get exactly the same amount. That is ridiculous, Mr. Chairman, and we never suggested it or advocated it. We said that there should be a floor that every person should get. In British Columbia, for people 65 years of age and over it is \$200. That is precisely what we are talking about, and I want to say to the hon. member for Sarnia-Lambton that there should be a floor for old age pensioners under the program provided by the federal government which should now be \$200 a month. Although I have not talked to the particular minister in charge of this in British Columbia, I believe that if we were to do that the province of British Columbia would supplement that \$200 floor.

We are going to support this bill because we support pension increases. This country is wealthier than it has ever been and can afford to let the people who worked so hard to develop it and have now retired have a share in the increased productivity and wealth. We have consistently called for increases but our proposals have equally consistently been opposed by Liberals and Conservatives. We have been told it is too expensive, too visionary, that the country cannot afford it, or that the time is not yet. There is always an excuse.

Old Age Security

During the election campaign we said that the country could afford a \$150 pension for senior citizens. We say now that the country can afford a pension of \$200 a month for senior citizens. We know this government is not ready to implement that proposal and that a Conservative government would not be ready to do so either. We therefore support this measure to increase the pension and the guaranteed income supplement to at least take care of the increased cost of living on a quarterly basis.

● (1750)

I now want to speak of something that was proposed some time ago. Two or three years ago I proposed that the old age pension and guaranteed income supplement should be adjusted periodically, not after the cost of living had risen but in advance of such rise. I have been critical of accountants who work for the Department of Finance and I am still critical, but I am certain that they have enough ability to estimate approximately by how much living costs will rise in the next three months, six months or next year. I suggest to the minister that he should seriously consider adjusting increases in the old age pension in advance of increases in the cost of living, rather than allowing pensions to lag, as at present. Pensioners at present suffer because pensions lag behind increases in living costs.

I have another criticism. The government is proposing to increase pensions on the basis of the overall increase in the cost of living. Pensioners face two serious problems in dealing with increased living costs. First there is the increase in food costs, an increase which is almost twice as great as the overall increase in living costs. I am not being critical when I say this, as I realize that a very substantial part of that increase has gone to farmers who in recent years have been underpaid for their produce. The increase in food costs has not been in the order of 4½ per cent, the amount by which the cost of living increased in the first six months of 1973, but in the neighbourhood of 9 or 10 per cent. So the proposed increase will not help greatly those people who are getting the old age pension or guaranteed income supplement.

The increase in housing costs has been even more substantial than that, and that ought to be taken into consideration. Without taking up too much time, may I suggest that the Minister of National Health and Welfare discuss with the minister in charge of housing ways to provide a dramatic increase in housing accommodation for senior citizens at rents which they can afford. I say this because every time we increase the old age pension private landlords who rent to old age pensioners immediately increase rents by almost the full increase in the pension, so that old age pensioners are left with very little of the increase that Parliament has awarded.

We have proposed that the basic old age pension should be \$200 per month for every person who qualifies. I again urge on the government, as other members of the NDP have urged, that the age at which people get the old age pension should be reduced to 60, and that the reduction should take place in the same way as when the age was reduced from 70 to 65. Pensionable age was reduced by one year at a time. In this case it ought to be reduced by one year at a time until older people who qualify can get the pension at age 60. I, like every other member of parlia-