

Social Security

amended the Old Age Security Act, emphasized the point that because Canadians were paying into the old age security fund they had coming to them as a right the benefits provided in the Old Age Security Act. One of those benefits is to have the basic pension escalated, if the cost of living goes up, by not more than 2 per cent in any one year. I suggest that to take that away at this time is unfair and unjust and in violation of a policy laid down by Parliament.

I should like to emphasize this point, Mr. Speaker, and with this I shall bring these remarks to a close, by indicating the kind of unfairness that will develop. Under this white paper, if a person is receiving old age security and a guaranteed income supplement combined, he will get up to a 2 per cent increase in his total income each year. But if a person is receiving, let us say, old age security and a retired civil servant's pension—and his total may be just about the same—he will get, by the legislation we passed last March, up to a 2 per cent annual increase in his retired civil servant's pension but no increase in his old age security pension. The third person is one in receipt of old age security and a pension from some private company or some other source. That person will get no increase at all because of the rise in the cost of living. On this basis in particular I think it is most unfair to cut out the annual increase in the basic old age security pension which was provided by Parliament and which is part of the contract we have made.

I agree with the Leader of the Opposition that it is unfortunate the government has not come through with an upward adjustment in the 2 per cent ceiling, but apart from that I submit that denying to the people of Canada who have provided for themselves some other resources and therefore cannot obtain the guaranteed income supplement the right to have their basic pensions escalated from here on is most unfair. This is the feature in the proposals before us to which I object most of all—the freezing of the basic pension at \$80 a month.

• (2:30 p.m.)

[*Translation*.]

Mr. Charles-Eugène Dionne (Kamouraska): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity of congratulating the government on its attitude toward Canadian families.

Since 1945, there has been a succession of pleas in favour of an increase in family allowances to parents and now the Economic Council of Canada is requesting, in its fifth annual report, among other things, a review of the Family Allowances Act, while also recording the constant increase in the cost of living. I see that the government has taken these recommendations into account.

To be sure, the time has come to adjust family allowances, as families in the low-income groups are in great need of help.

There is still a great deal to be achieved. Let us hope that the Canadian government will give more and more consideration to the family—consideration coupled with

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

action. Our birth rate is alarmingly low. Let us help families in a concrete and efficient way.

It is a fact that children have a much better chance to live than they used to, but it is hardly fair to say that the mortality rate in respect of certain types of illness has declined. It has been, in a way, limited through the progress of science, through admirable efforts on the part of doctors as well as through the co-operation and enlightenment of parents.

Judging this progress from only one criteria, that of life conservation, Canada, one of the richest countries in the world, does not rank very high yet among the nations of the world. As a matter of fact, 12 countries have an infant mortality rate lower than Canada.

As far as allowances are concerned, we should take a logical position, because, according to the amounts allocated to foster-homes we find it more profitable to raise other peoples' children.

With regard to old age security pensions, we believe the rate adjustment to be simply ludicrous. There are over 1.5 million senior citizens in Canada, many of whom have reached age 65, with little or no income.

Many a time these hardships are their only reward for a life of toil. It would have been in order to adjust their pensions upwards so as to ensure a decent standard of living. Because of limited protection against rising prices, old age pensioners have felt the bite of inflation much more than most other Canadians.

The social needs of our senior citizens are too often neglected. Retirement draws the worker away from active participation in the activities of those institutions he previously belonged to. Because of some disability or other, or lack of income, they may also be deprived of the services offered in their neighborhood or the community. They may come up against problems that require the help of an expert, but they do not know where to go, and cannot always move about to get help.

Canada must play its proper role toward its older citizens by making sure their years of retirement are as pleasant and fruitful as the resources of the country can allow.

I have watched the behaviour of many political men closely enough to conclude that most of them would favour increasing family allowances and adjusting the old age pension reasonably. Still, they remain paralyzed, because of lack of money or the need to increase taxes, according to their concept of scarcity in an age of affluence.

However, ministers, members of Parliament, senators, judges, commissioners, not to mention the protégés of the system, provide against the cost of living increase. This last category has followed, when it did not go beyond, the cost of living requirements. Nonetheless, it is strange to see how easy it is to understand problems when one's own security is at stake, and how difficult it is to understand a situation as unfortunate as that of a high proportion of our Canadian families.