

Old Age Security Act

I should like to associate myself and my colleagues with the thoughts expressed in the Senate Report on Poverty:

To do what must be done will certainly cost money. Lack of action will cost many times more. What inaction will cost in lost humanity will cost many times more . . . Canadian people whose lives are spent in a far different world are ready to face the challenge . . . it is for the citizens of Canada to demand that this be our priority project for the seventies . . . we need search no further for a national purpose—

• (1410)

[Translation]

In closing, Mr. Speaker, no utterances seem to me more striking and more thought-provoking at the same time than those of Mr. Hubert de Ravinel whose charity organization dedicated to the golden age, the Little Brothers of the Poor, is so greatly admired and so worthy of our support.

In an interview given to the magazine *Actualité* in December 1972, Mr. Hubert de Ravinel expressed himself as follows:

An existence shared between day-to-day petty worries and the dreary view of a slummy back yard, or the solitude of a big institution for the aged . . . waiting for pensions to be increased, for problems to be alleviated, each day similar to the one before, the monotony of an unchallenging future, such are, in brief, the board horizons offered to the senior citizens of our cities.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that this House will see to it that the description given by Mr. Hubert de Ravinel will in time become just a bad memory.

Mr. Arthur Portelance (Gamelin): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured as a member of the government to comment on Bill C-147 entitled: An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act. This bill is intended to increase the basic amount of the old age security pension from \$80 to \$100 per month effective April 1, 1973, with future escalation to commence May 1, 1974. Because of the escalation now in effect, the monthly pension that has been paid since January 1, 1972 is \$82.88.

I would like to join with all my colleagues to congratulate the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde) for his quick response to the request of senior citizens who are rightfully asking the Canadian government to help them through an increase in the basic rate of pension, which will enable them to live more decently and to continue, even during their years of retirement, to do their duty as citizens and to be proud as Canadians.

Mr. Speaker, a few days ago, I sent a questionnaire to all my constituents of Gamelin, and nobody will be surprised to learn that most of those who were kind enough to answer and to add some comments were mainly concerned with the welfare of our senior citizens, either with regard to pensions or to housing. It is precisely in that direction that this government is going.

I know that in Canada there are still some glaring injustices. It is not easy to eliminate them all at the same time. The present government is now trying to help first the most destitute, especially old people, large families, disabled persons, the unemployed and small wage-earners.

It is certain, as mentioned in the throne speech, that the next important piece of social legislation will be to

[Mr. Wagner.]

increase family allowances in order to make them as generous as old age pensions.

Mr. Speaker, it is good sometimes to compare oneself with others, to tell all Canadians what is going on outside our country, and to learn that Canada remains a forerunner in many fields, particularly in the area of social assistance. I have with me an article from the *Toronto Globe and Mail*, dated February 16, 1973. That article indicates that the old people in the United Kingdom, even if that country has now a Conservative government—maybe they are the elder brothers of our Progressive Conservatives—receive pensions that are not as generous as those received by ours, and I quote:

[English]

A retired person receives \$16.70 a week if single. The state pension for a married couple is \$27.25 a week.

If the old person has no income or savings, he or she can apply for supplementary benefits worth about \$1 a week as well as for other payments to cover rent averaging \$7.50.

[Translation]

And that's not all, Mr. Speaker.

[English]

Just recently pensions were increased,—

[Translation]

Just imagine what they were previously. And I quote further:

[English]

—with both unions and the government claiming credit though pensioners themselves played a role by staging a demonstration outside the House of Commons.

[Translation]

In fact, the senior citizens of Canada did not have to demonstrate in front of the House of Commons. This government had already increased the basic pension from \$75 to \$80 in April 1971, as well as the guaranteed income supplement to \$55 a month for single people and to \$47.50 for each spouse when both members of a married couple are eligible.

For those who received the GIS, the total pension was subject to an annual increase based on their pension tied to the cost of living index. We know that now total pensions will go up with the cost of living thanks to the new bill now before the House: single people who get the GIS will be entitled to \$170.14 a month, and married couples to \$324.60.

The old age security pensions amounted to \$40 a month in 1952; from April 1, 1973 it will be \$170.14 a month, including the GIS; of course, this represents an increase of over 400 per cent.

• (1420)

As a Canadian, I am proud to say that Canada is the first country in the world to provide that protection to the elderly. Canada is the first country in the world having legislated that people be eligible for a pension notwithstanding contributions they may or may not have paid into a pension plan and without subordination to various tests. The Canadian people are being guaranteed a revenue allowing them to live their retirement years with security and self-respect.