

Old Age Security Act Amendment

other authority can exchange information contained in the applications for such numbers with the department which will be administering this particular act.

There, Mr. Speaker, are nine areas in which further investigation may be made in order to see whether an old age pensioner has correctly assessed or disclosed the proper information to the government.

Mr. MacEachen: You are completely misconstruing the clause, completely misconstruing it.

Mr. Churchill: The minister will have the chance to explain this later on, Mr. Speaker. It is rather an odd situation. He talks about privileged information in the form which will be filled out by the old age pensioners, and he then goes on to talk about exceptions with regard to information obtained on behalf of the minister, and exceptions with regard to information obtained under any other act and from social insurance numbers.

We will be giving the minister plenty of opportunity to explain this when we get into the details of the bill, Mr. Speaker, but here he is imposing upon the old age pensioners of this country a means test and a snoopers test. I think this is going to be a very humiliating experience for our old age pensioners. It will mean duplication and an intensification of government investigation of matters of this sort over and over again. I think it will take an army of public servants to get all the information that the minister will require.

As I pointed out at the resolution stage, Mr. Speaker, how ridiculous it is to embark upon a course with regard to which we know there will be great difficulty. There are tests of means applied in other areas of the government. Let me mention the war veterans allowances as one example. I know from actual experience the great difficulty and hardship involved in determining the income of a person on war veterans allowance and in getting rebates when a mistake has been made either by the applicant or the department, with embarrassment to all concerned. Yet the minister is embarking upon this course with regard to our old age pensioners.

All of this, Mr. Speaker, was wiped out in the fall of 1951 and when the act came into operation in January of 1952. Several hon. members have drawn attention to the operations of the joint commission which studied this problem and reported in 1950. They have also drawn attention to the action taken by this House of Commons in 1951. I suggest that

[Mr. Churchill.]

anyone interested in the subject should read the report of that committee and read *Hansard* for the period when the subject matter was dealt with in this house, so that they have the background to this problem.

Is it rather astonishing, Mr. Speaker, that after 30 years' operation of old age pensions—because they started quite early—the decision was reached that the means test should be abolished. This was not a hasty decision. The proposal had been advanced on many occasions prior to 1950; it had been discussed in the house, in the other chamber and by various people time and time again. So it was not, as I say, a hasty decision; it was a carefully considered conclusion arrived at by responsible people.

I had occasion, Mr. Speaker, to refer to *Hansard* for the second session of 1951, and I noted that that session was remarkable, in the opinion of two or three people, in that the hon. member for Brandon-Souris (Mr. Dinsdale), the hon. member for Queens (Mr. MacLean) and myself, along with Howie Meeker, entered this chamber the victors in four by-elections which had taken place in June 1951. The powers of survival of the three of us still here are worthy of note.

Despite that important aspect of the second session of 1951, Mr. Speaker, I think it was overshadowed in the minds of objective observers by the speech from the throne and by the activity which took place in that particular session. Let me just read from *Hansard* for Tuesday, October 9, 1951, page 1, this paragraph from the speech from the throne:

The primary reason for summoning you for a second session in the present year is to invite your consideration of a measure to provide increased security for our older citizens through payment of pensions, without a means test and as a matter of right, to all Canadians with appropriate residence qualifications who are over the age of 70 years, and to establish a fund made up of special contributions levied for that purpose.

That, sir, was the purpose of having the second session of parliament in the fall of 1951. The primary reason for summoning the members together, as outlined in the speech from the throne, was to abolish the means test and to give pensions as a matter of right. I was very much impressed with that when I came here as a new member.

● (5:00 p.m.)

I listened with interest to the debate that took place when the actual bill was introduced. I was impressed with the presentation of the then minister of national health and