

Old Age Security Act

still stands. The fact is that now they are being treated even better, and I say to you that I am proud to be a backbencher in a government that has done so much for the senior citizens of this country in the past four years.

• (1550)

May I remind you, Mr. Speaker, that it was only a few years ago when old age pensions in this country were \$40 a month, payable at age 70. We find now that those people, who for some reason or another have not enough money at age 65 to support themselves, will receive \$150 a month for a single person and \$285 for a married couple. This is the result of the efforts of this government. Every member of this Parliament and every Canadian should hold his head high and say proudly that we have treated our senior citizens, who made Canada great, as well financially as this country can afford. We would like to do better but we are now doing better than anywhere else in the world.

When I say that this is the best pension scheme in the world, I should ask my hon. friends to remember what other countries have in the way of pension schemes. The United States, the wealthiest country in the world, does not have an old age pension scheme. Let us look at socialistic Sweden, and England which, as I have said before, has been drowning in socialism for many years. Let us consider the pensions those countries pay and compare them with the old age pension scheme of this country. Our scheme has been created chiefly by this government and the Diefenbaker Conservative government. I suggest you get a good old age pension scheme as a result of having a free enterprise system in a country because then it can afford to pay great pensions such as we are paying at the present time.

I listened a few minutes ago to the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson) castigate the government. I was somewhat surprised, but I must apologize because I do not really think he was speaking on behalf of my good Conservative friends. I think he must have been speaking as a former Cr ditiste when he castigated the government for not doing something for widows at age 60. We all feel sorry for these people, but let me remind the hon. member that when the party he now supports was last in office old age pensions, not only for widowed people but for the so-called heads of the household, were given at age 70, and the amount was not anywhere near what it is today.

Many other things have been done for our senior citizens in Canada. Every member of this House, whether he is on the government side or not, can proudly say that nobody who receives the old age pension plus the income supplement from January 1 of this year, amounting to \$150 a month single and \$285 a month for a couple, will pay one single cent of income tax into the coffers of this government. I say this is a mighty good thing, and the government should be proud of itself.

I also think of what has been done in the medicare and hospitalization fields. I also remember that in most provinces, if not in all of them, no one who is receiving a supplemented old age pension today pays anything to medicare. I think of what happens in my own province of Ontario, and I am sure this is true of other provinces. No one 65 years of age or over pays one single copper in

hospitalization costs. Once more, I am proud to be a Canadian and a member of a government team which has made this possible.

I think also of the many senior citizens' homes that have been built in Canada from Vancouver to Newfoundland. Only 20 years ago there was no such thing as cheap housing for our senior citizens. There were no senior citizens' homes like those being built all over the country for those people who helped to make Canada great. Once again, I hold my head high and am proud to be a Canadian.

This does not mean we could not do better. It would have been nice to raise basic pensions to \$150 per month as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) suggested. The fact is that this would cost \$1,400 million, and I suggest that we must tell the people of Canada where that money is to be found. Some months ago, before this bill was even conceived, we had the best pension system for senior citizens of any country in the world. When this bill is given third reading, we will be able to say to the whole world that our system is even better. It has been made better because we appreciate these people who have really made this country great.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I hesitate to interrupt the hon. member, but I think I should remind the House that one hour was assigned for the completion of this debate before the vote. I had hoped there would be representations from all parties during the hour. Only seven minutes remain, and I believe the hon. member for Bellechasse (Mr. Lambert) hoped to have two or three minutes to close the debate. I hope the hon. member will keep that in mind and, if possible, bring his remarks to a close very soon.

Mr. Whicher: I appreciate your bringing that to my attention, Mr. Speaker, and naturally I will abide by your wishes.

In closing, I should just like to point out that about six members of the opposition party spoke last night, but the government did not have one speaker during that time. Like every member on the government side, I want to be fair. I am sure the Cr ditistes have views to put forward, so I will not use up all the time. I simply say that there is much more we could do in this country. This is not heaven, by any means; it is still called Canada, but it is the next thing to heaven as far as our senior citizens are concerned. If my hon. friends to the left do not believe what I say, let them name one country that is closer to heaven than this country of ours.

Mr. Bell: Prince Edward Island is heaven to me.

Mr. Paproski: Alberta.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I greatly appreciate your intervention. I also thank the hon. member who spoke before me for the courtesy he has shown me.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to avail myself of the few minutes at my disposal to deal with very serious matters. I shall not attempt to refute some of the arguments put forward concerning Cr ditiste hon. members because time is too valuable.