

OLD AGE SECURITY BILL

SECOND READING

Hon. Gustave Monette moved the second reading of Bill 19, to amend the Old Age Security Act.

He said: Honourable senators, I ask your indulgence. This is the first time I have risen to address you in support of an important bill, and while I feel moved by what is for me the gravity of the occasion, I am none the less appreciative also of the good will and dignity of this house.

I have been asked to give a few words of explanation of the bill. I shall not occupy you very long, because I suppose that every honourable senator knows the content and purpose of the bill. It may be sufficient to mention that it contains three important features. First, it provides for the increase of the monthly pension from \$46 to \$55. Second, it reduces from 20 to 10 years the basic minimum period of residence which entitles the applicant to a pension, but with an accessory provision that if there has not been continuity of residence for 10 years the applicant may establish his eligibility by proof that he has been in Canada for double the time of his total periods of absence within the 10 years preceding the application. The third feature of the bill provides for the extension from three months to six months of the period which qualified pensioners are entitled, without loss of pension, to spend outside Canada in any calendar year.

This measure, honourable senators, evidences the desire of the Government to honour a pledge which during the last election was solemnly given to the Canadian people, and specifically to our senior citizens. The principle of honouring a solemn promise is one which, I believe, will be approved by everyone concerned.

The bill amends the Old Age Security Act. It has been said in some quarters that the Government is not bringing in a new principle, but one which was embodied in the act that it is now being sought to amend. That is true. The amendments in no way violate a principle which was made law as a result of the work of an all-party committee which, in 1950, was formed to study ways of improving existing legislation. This committee presented recommendations which were adopted by the then administration. As I have said, the proposals emanated from a committee representative of all parties, and they served as the basis of a law whereby a citizen of Canada who has attained the age of 70 years or more is entitled as a matter of right to a pension. That was the principle.

I think honourable senators will agree that this legislation does not go against the existing law. The purpose of the bill is to increase the pension from \$46 to \$55 per month, and to reduce the residence requirement from 20 to 10 years, which I think is a reasonable period in view of the fact that a person wishing to avail himself of old age security benefits need not be a Canadian citizen. As honourable senators know, the present Old Age Security Act does not contain the usual requirement as to citizenship found in similar legislation in other countries. The bill does not amend that principle; it merely requires that the old age pensioner should have attained the age of 70 years—which is a requirement under the present act—and have resided in Canada for a total of 10 years.

It has been said that it will cost approximately \$96 million per year to increase the pension from \$46 to \$55 per month.

Honourable senators, I do not think I need say anything further except that the legislation before us points out the insufficiency or inadequacy of the present pension. Honourable senators may have different opinions as to what the monthly pension payment should be, but this is a security measure and the pension goes as a matter of right to any citizen who qualifies under the act. As it is generally felt that the present pension rate is not sufficient, I earnestly hope that honourable senators will agree to passage of the bill. It would be an act of justice in the case of people who immigrate to this country, some of whom are perhaps loath to do so because of existing pension rights in their native land. Immigrants who reside here for 10 years and remain good citizens will benefit under the bill, which will no doubt enhance Canada's reputation in other countries.

Hon. Mr. Reid: Did the honourable senator state that a person need not be a Canadian citizen to come under the act as it is now?

Hon. Mr. Croll: That is right.

Hon. Mr. Monette: A person need only reside in this country a certain period of time.

Hon. Mr. Reid: Well, when the legislation was first introduced a person had to be a Canadian citizen in order to benefit.

Hon. Mr. Croll: No.

Hon. Mr. Monette: The honourable senator knows that similar legislation in other countries requires that the pensioner be a citizen of the country in which he is drawing the pension. That is not the case under our act. The bill simply reduces the residence requirement from 20 to 10 years; it does not