

*Old Age Security Act Amendment*

pension index to reflect changes in the cost of living.

The focusing of the additional payment on those who need it most is based on the use of the new income test proposed by the Croll committee. I think we should be very clear on this. No matter how the opposition tries to twist and turn the income test, it is not the demeaning means test that is required for qualifying under the old age assistance and disability programs which exist at the present time. Also it is not the more humane and realistic needs test called for to qualify for benefit under the Canada Assistance Plan.

It is a new and simple approach recognizing the privacy and dignity of the individual. It is my understanding that once a year the pensioner will complete a form listing his income as defined for income tax purposes, income earned in the preceding year, and he will send it to the Department of National Health and Welfare. This form will be used as a basis for the pensioner receiving a supplement in the current year. He will be able to fill in this form himself in his own home, although of course he will also always be able to seek the help of friends, government officials or even his Member of Parliament. Surely, this is a very different thing from the present means test which rightly disturbs those who must seek help under the present old age assistance programs.

Under the means test an investigator comes and pokes around and talks to every applicant. This is not to happen under the guaranteed income program. With the means test, a percentage of the value of a person's own home is deemed as income even when he obtains no revenue at all, from it in the form of rent. This will not happen with the income test. A man's savings over a certain amount under the means test, and not merely the interest on them, are calculated as income for the purpose of granting old age assistance or a similar pension. This, also, will not happen under the income test. Gifts of money from relatives will not be considered as income under the new program, according to the information the minister has provided.

There are many other differences that I could mention between the means test and the proposed income test. The minister has already outlined them in some detail and I am sure they will be discussed in an even more detailed manner as the consideration of the bill continues. To say that the form required to be completed in order to qualify for this additional payment under the program constitutes

[Mr. Gray.]

a means test is, I think, misleading to say the least. I suggest that it involves a means test no more than the much more complex form which has to be filed every year for income tax purposes or, for that matter the application required to obtain an old age security pension itself.

● (4:50 p.m.)

Let us not forget that everyone who wants an old age pension must first complete and file an application. The present old age pension cheques do not start arriving automatically. An applicant first must meet tests of age and residence; it is not enough for him to fill in a form and send it in. Evidence must be submitted and the requirements are often complex and detailed. It is often not so easy to obtain the evidence. I think almost every hon. member has been approached at one time or another by an older person asking him for help in filling in the form and in finding out how he can obtain the evidence required by the Department of National Health and Welfare so that he may begin receiving his old age security pension. There are requirements for class A and class B evidence, and so on.

In passing, I might say that criticism has been voiced of the provision for a right of appeal under the government's proposed guaranteed income legislation. But there are appeal tribunals for those who are not satisfied with the department's rulings on the applications for old age security pensions.

I must say I have never heard the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) or anyone in his party, or the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis) or anyone in her party, complain about the need to fill in an application form for old age security or complain of the tests, which can be quite complicated, required to obtain an old age security pension or even of the existence of an appeal procedure provided under that legislation. May I suggest that generally, older people have not found the procedures required to obtain the old age security pension or the application forms needed as evidence before the appeals tribunals to be a form of snooping. I suggest that the form even though it is required annually by the government under the proposed guaranteed income program is not one which should be burdensome or oppressive.

The best evidence that the government's measure does not involve a means test is contained in the very recommendations of the