

Old Age Security Act

following the introduction of the budget and the \$100 figure, signed by the vice-president, Mr. Fred Hannocho. It is not very long and succinctly expresses the feelings of senior citizens since the budget has been introduced. It reads:

I find the recent announced increase in the old age security pension to \$100 a month disappointing. This does not begin to take care of the increase in the cost of living. We know that in Alberta approximately two-thirds of us are living on only the old age security and all or some part of the guaranteed income supplement, which means that many pensioners are living at a poverty level. The announced increase does little to improve our standard of living when you consider the cost of the necessities of life, in particular food and housing. Inadequate pensions force us to become second-class citizens and therefore dependent on others and special services. After giving 40 years of our lives towards building Canada we feel that we have been let down. We would like to be able to live our remaining years in dignity and pride.

• (2130)

Those are the sorts of messages some of us have received. They reflect on events which have taken place in this country in the past ten days. These have caused not only unhappiness but concern in a very great section of our community. I can say this on the basis of having talked to hundreds of senior citizens last summer and fall. Let me tell Your Honour about a couple that came up to me in the shopping centre, because their words will express more poignantly than any of mine what the people in this country feel.

A lady, accompanied by her husband, came to me in a shopping centre and said, "Can you tell me what is wrong with Canada? My husband and I worked hard through the years. We worked during the thirties and during the forties when times were hard and salaries low. Now we have managed to save a little; not enough to live on, just a tiny bit. We need a fair old age pension." She then said to me, "Why can we not get a decent pension when people who are unemployed can collect \$100 a week after having worked a short time, and when so much money in our society is paid for programs like Opportunities for Youth, and so on?" Then she said, "Is there not something wrong when we who have contributed so much to our country and society get so little and when those who do not really need money are given so much?"

Mr. Alexander: That's the just society!

Mr. Roche: I told her I thought she had put her finger on what was wrong with modern Canada. That lady and hundreds like her with whom I have talked have told me that senior citizens in this country feel abused because they feel someone is playing games with them. Let me tell you why they feel this way, Mr. Speaker. Last year the government introduced the New Horizons program. I will not speak against the New Horizons program now; I do not want members of the government to accuse me of being opposed to senior citizens merely because I am opposed to the New Horizons program.

Mr. Speaker, I am against that program because so many of our senior citizens are against it. They do not support it because they are not able to get money for projects they are asked to submit. The youth of this country are given all sorts of money for programs like Opportunities for Youth and other programs, including school-

[Mr. Roche.]

ing, which I support. On the other hand, senior citizens who submit projects under the New Horizons program are told there is not enough money for them. When I spoke about senior citizens previously, that was one of the problems uppermost in my mind.

A couple of weeks ago during the debate on supplementary estimates some members said they were disenchanted with the New Horizons program. Some hon. members opposite tried to make it sound as if members of the party I support oppose the interests of senior citizens because we are trying to show what is wrong with the program. Let me say that I am opposed to the bill introduced by the Minister of National Health and Welfare even though I will vote for it because, as the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre said, any increase is better than none.

I oppose this bill because it represents a piecemeal approach to the solution of a complicated problem. The minister had some good things to say about the comprehensive approach that is needed. I will deal with that in a minute; I want to finish telling the House how senior citizens think and feel about certain government programs. In this connection I wish to introduce a topic that has been on my mind for a long time, that of national unity. I will not deal with the French and English problem in this country. Although we are making progress, much progress still has to be made on that crucial front in this country.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. Would the hon. member please resume his seat? The hon. member said a moment ago that he would not go into what he called the English and French problem. I would hope so, because I must bring to his attention that the bill presently before the House is Bill C-147, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act. It was all right for hon. members to roam over their general fields of concern for Canada while we were on the budget debate, but now there is a specific bill before the House. Hon. members must remember that what is vital and basic to parliamentary conduct is the rule of relevancy. All hon. members are to respect this rule and debate what is before us, namely, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act.

Mr. Roche: Mr. Speaker, I agree with your interpretation of my remarks. May I submit to you that the question of national unity is extremely important in this connection, as the aged are part of our nation and want to participate in its affairs. They want to be plugged into our society, if you like. I say that there will not be national unity in this country so long as sections of it such as the aged, women, and youth feel alienated and dispossessed. The aged feel this way particularly. The thrust of my argument is that there will not be a stable society in Canada until each of the various components of our society is able to participate in its activities.

As I have said, the aged feel that they are being used. Why do I say that, Mr. Speaker? Simply because I suggest this basic increase could have been introduced a few months ago. Why did it need a dramatic political event to bring about circumstances such as those now prevailing in the House before action could be taken in this field? It must be clear to the pensioners and senior citizens of this country that the government has not understood their