

Old Age and Veterans' Pensions

If we do not take the sort of emergency action that I have described, these pensions will erode in value to such an extent that our pensioners will be where they were 50 years ago, back on square one, to the days when we did not admit that we should even provide an old age pension. I remind the House that it was not easy to get the first old age pensions legislation through. Of course, it was said at that time that we could not afford it. After all, we never can afford social welfare legislation; it is always a case of jam tomorrow but never jam today. Every piece of welfare legislation has had to be fought for.

I urge that the government take the chance to do something for our pensioners now. We have been listening to expressions of sympathy from members in all parts of the House. However, I appeal to the members on the other side of the House to do something besides crying tears and shedding blood in this House. The place is getting a little messy with all that liquid floating around. If half a dozen members on the other side would vote for this measure, it would do more to move the government and to help the elderly people of this country than anything that even the eloquence of the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce might accomplish. He ought to know about conditions in some parts of his riding.

Further, I suggest that if these hon. members would take this course, there would be no retaliation on the part of the government. Much as the front benches of the government would like to cow the backbenchers into submission, they would never dare discipline half a dozen of their own members who had the courage to stand up for the old people and veterans of this country.

Mr. R. E. McKinley (Huron): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me at this time to speak out in this chamber on behalf of our pensioners in Canada. We Canadians are living in a very affluent age. Through our own efforts we have raised ourselves to a standard of living that is envied by most of the world and we should be extremely proud of our achievements in this regard.

However, I suggest that we cannot be entirely proud of our accomplishments until we have remedied some of the serious injustices that exist in this country. Thousands of Canadians through no fault of their own are becoming increasingly deprived with each passing day. Canadians who have worked for a lifetime in Canada and have contributed to

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

the nation's development find themselves trapped by inadequate pensions and incomes. Daily they watch helplessly as their pensions shrink further as a result of an inflation that has been brought about by many years of callous Liberal spending.

Some of these Canadians to whom I refer made special sacrifices in the defence of this country during world wars, though this is something that does not concern the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau), among others in the cabinet. But these veterans must not be forgotten. Others of them served in the government service, and often felt honoured to do so. Yet today people such as retired CNR employees must feel just a little bitter about the callous disregard of their plight by those in power. Therefore, we are here tonight to end this bitterness. We are here to prove to the Canadian people, and to our veterans and retired Canadians in particular, that although the Liberal government is cold and uncaring, Parliament is just. As members here, we can do nothing but plead their cause.

Let me speak for a moment about the old age security pension. Quite obviously, it is inadequate. This year the basic pension is \$79.58. For those with no other income the government will provide an additional amount of \$31.83. This provides a grand total of \$111.41 a month, which comes to \$1,336.92 a year. In this way it sounds even worse. There was a time when this amount of money represented a decent income, but it is completely inadequate in the Canada of the 1970s. It does not even reach the dizzy heights of the \$30 a week which our friendly, smiling finance minister has indicated is sufficient to live on in this country. Even by his penny-pinching standards the pension must be raised.

• (9:00 p.m.)

I hope he will be here tonight to vote with his conscience, and I like to think he would vote in favour of the motion. However, I would hate to count on it. The sad thing is that we are not speaking of a small minority of our elderly Canadians. According to the government's own admission in the brief the Department of National Health and Welfare presented to the Senate Committee on Poverty, 474,000 Canadians, almost half a million, and 31 per cent of all elderly Canadians are trapped in this situation. These are the Canadians who have no other income and therefore receive the full guaranteed income