

Old Age Security Act

in the Quebec National Assembly, a law on old age security which undeniably belongs to the field of welfare. We are now dealing with something pertaining to social security. In normal conditions, had it not been for the weakness of the Quebec government, it would never have been introduced. The federal government would never have had to do anything with it. But let us take for granted that the circumstances were such that at a certain moment the central government began to administer old age security pensions and family allowances. One must admit, and the hon. minister should also admit it, that that really belongs to the social security field which should normally be under provincial jurisdiction. However, on account of a precedent and an amendment to the constitution the federal government takes care of it. So why would the central government, which is supposed to ensure co-ordination throughout Canada, not establish social security standards that the provinces could apply? I do not see any inconsistency there.

[English]

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. Members: No.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: It being one o'clock, I do now leave the chair.

At one o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 2 p.m.

• (1410)

Mr. P. B. Rynard (Simcoe North): Mr. Speaker, it is with a good deal of pleasure that I rise to take part in this debate. May I congratulate the minister on what he has done in this bill. I do not think that any trained seal could have taken the flip flop that he has so quickly and so well and come back here in his chameleon coat and presented what he has. But it is heartening to see the government is finally reacting to public opinion and demands, even if it means it has had to make a complete shift in policy. For let us make no mistake about it, this is a complete shift in policy. If anybody doubts that it is, I will document all the motions and debates we have had in the House as recorded in *Hansard*. Otherwise, I shall not refer to that, because I believe the minister realizes as well as I do the complete shift in policy that has taken place. The government is finally acknowledging the fact that in not providing for an escalating feature it was not compensating people for dollars constantly being eroded by inflation. As I have said, we now see with pleasure the compassion of the government in reversing its previous attitudes to this question.

A little less than seven weeks ago, namely on March 23, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) rejected the Progressive Conservative's appeal to the government to contribute to the pensions, allowances and other benefits granted or administered by the government

[Mr. Matte.]

a yearly percentage increase corresponding to the percentage increase in the consumer price index for Canada. On that night the minister voted against the appeal, and I am going to quote later what he said. Today, the House of Commons is in the incongruous position of having the same resolution introduced by none other than the minister himself. What miracle wrought this conversion from a steadfast no on March 23 to an ecstatic yes on May 8? I would venture to guess that the government got a tremendous number of letters from people all over the country and that the senior citizens organizations were making their voices heard.

As a matter of fact, the minister had some interesting comments to make on March 23. He dismissed our request for fairness to be shown Canada's 1,800,000 recipients of the universal old age pension and our pleas that he raise pensions to a decent level and peg them to the rise in the cost of living. As reported at page 1103 of *Hansard* for March 23, the minister said:

As a government we have obviously decided that in terms of bringing money to those who need it in waging a successful campaign against poverty we must change from making universal payments to everyone, irrespective of income, to a selective technique. We must have an income test—I call it a guaranteed income technique—applied to what was previously our universal demogrant program of old age security and family allowance.

So, between March 23 and May 8 the minister suddenly discovers that the old age pensioners deserve a better break and adjusts their payments by granting a cost of living increase, as we argued on March 23. Perhaps the minister found much sympathy within his own party for the Conservative motion, and I venture to suggest that is one other reason he had this sudden conversion.

The minister mentioned certain programs and went on at length to deal with what the Liberal party had done over the years for our senior citizens to stimulate them mentally, to create jobs in areas where they would be adept at handling them, and he also mentioned what the pensioners were doing now. Stimulating them to do something is a very good plan. They have shown over and over again, by presenting their own case and grouping together, strength and faith in themselves in bringing their problems to their members of parliament. That the minister has gone along with this type of activity among themselves makes it all very worth while.

In many instances the pensioners have presented case histories to back up their position that they were living in poverty. Our elderly people have just as much right to share in the rising standard of living that has taken place since the last world war,—this was a point made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles)—having suffered and accepted the hardships of the thirties that preserved and laid the foundations for what we have today. The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre went on to say that there were other things besides the cost of living index, and referred to the gross national product, the quality of life and other matters. But all this goes back to the thirties.

It is not necessary to go into this in detail, although some of us do forget that in the thirties the old age pensioners of today earned from \$20 to \$50 a month in the labour market. Even professional people like doctors ready to go into practice earned from \$100 to \$150 a