

Old Age Security

than the old age security pension, then your pride will not be strong enough for you to turn away crumbs which might give you a full stomach. Therefore, undeniably, the changes in this aspect of the bill will be welcomed by quite a large number of people in Canada. But, Mr. Speaker, I would suggest that even those people should remember that in many cases the benefits they are to receive will come from the pockets of people even poorer than them. I am thinking of people who are retired on a small pension to which there is not attached even a 2 per cent increase in the cost of living index, retired teachers, retired industrial workers who are in receipt of a pension from a group pension plan to which they contributed and who also during their working years contributed to the old age security fund. Under this legislation they will not be entitled to a 2 per cent cost of living increase to their private pensions.

They will be denied an increase of 2 per cent on their old age security, which means that as far as this bill is concerned their income will be frozen for as long as they live. No matter what may happen to the cost of living, whether it goes up 2 per cent, 4 per cent, 6 per cent or 8 per cent per year, they will be frozen forever at that level of income. Mr. Speaker, I think in considering this question we should realize that if they have an income in addition to their old age security, if they are single of \$110 a month or more, or an income of \$190 a month or more from a pension or other source, they will not benefit by one penny from the guaranteed income supplement.

So when we talk about pensioners and freezing incomes that will not be adjusted in relation to the cost of living, we are talking about people getting \$190 a month if they are single, or \$350 if they are a married couple both on the old age security pension. No one can suggest, by any stretch of the imagination, that they are rich. That is what I mean when I say that even those who will get this increase in the guaranteed income supplement, welcome us undoubtedly it will be to them, should remember that by this legislation they are being put into a preferred position in relation to many of their fellow citizens who are living in retirement.

This, Mr. Speaker, is evidence so far as I am concerned that the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) was not in any way stretching things when he said at the outset of the debate that this was a bad bill. It is the kind of bill that makes me cringe because it has come as a poor substitute for all the high hopes held out since this Liberal administration began. This is the legislation introduced, despite all the high hopes that were built up by replies to questions to the Minister of National Health and Welfare about bringing forth his white paper, when it was going to come, and the hints dropped that we were moving into an era in which we would be thinking in terms of implementing guaranteed income security in the sense that we understand its possibility in our technologically advanced society. The hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton said this was the sort of thing we should be thinking about; yet in his muddled-thinking way—I cannot help saying that—he apparently

[Mr. Barnett.]

is quite happy with the kind of bill the government has brought forward. He is apparently quite happy that we should retain the philosophy of handing out crumbs to the poor.

It is increasingly difficult to accept those crumbs. The time has passed when one should be in any way grateful for those crumbs, because anyone who knows about the potential production of goods and services in Canada knows it is completely unnecessary that today anyone should be living at the kinds of levels that will be set under this bill in the combination of old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement.

● (4:00 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. André Fortin (Lotbinière): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-202, to amend the Old Age Security Act, is now before the House.

This bill, tabled by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro), is the result of the tabling of the white paper on income security in Canada which, after a fashion, stands as an admission of the liberal government's sins for having remained inactive in the field of income security.

For a long time now, the Ralliement créditiste has been asking that a guaranteed minimum income be made available to every Canadian citizen, regardless of his language, race, religion or social status.

Taking its inspiration in the white paper in which it hastily discards the minimum guaranteed income, the government now proposes to increase old age security to a certain level. On December 2, 1970, the minister said:

In 1967, the combined benefits were \$105 if single and \$210 for couples. At the rate prices have been increasing since then, the corresponding values for these amounts in January 1971 would be \$122 and \$245. Our proposed rates of \$135 and \$255 more than restore what their pensions would have been had there been no limiting of escalation.

Mr. Speaker, the purpose of income security is to give social protection to counterbalance the inability to earn a living. Therefore, the income must not only be guaranteed but stabilized. I think that in this connection the white paper is based on that principle and is consequently praiseworthy.

However, old people in Canada have always been considered as poor to whom a measly monthly allowance of \$79 is granted. If they do not succeed in making ends meet with \$79 and a few cents per month, a lot of investigators intervene to give them reluctantly what is called the guaranteed income supplement.

This is perhaps what we dread most, the reluctant payment of a certain amount on the ground that the needs of the recipient have increased.

Mr. Speaker, we must not be prompted today by gratefulness to old people but it is our duty to recognize their rights. The elderly are really entitled to a decent living in Canada.