

Old Age Security Act Amendment

The Chairman: Order. Pursuant to an agreement just reached I do now leave the chair and the committee will resume its sitting at seven o'clock.

SITTING SUSPENDED

SITTING RESUMED

The committee resumed at 7 p.m.

The Chairman: Order. The hon. member for Fraser Valley.

Mr. Patterson: Mr. Chairman, we finally have reached consideration in this committee of an issue which I believe is of more urgent importance than many which have occupied our attention for some time. This house seems to be prone to getting bogged down in matters of passing concern or in expending its time and energy on problems which probably have more political connotation than anything else. At this particular time, however, we are discussing a matter of continuing concern to a large segment of our society, namely, the senior citizens of this country. I suppose arguments in favour of increases in the old age pension payments at this time are almost redundant. Throughout the past months debate has taken place on various occasions and while suggestions and questions have been raised by some hon. members concerning the ability of our economy to sustain such increases, I cannot remember anyone advancing the argument that those increases were not necessary.

● (7:10 p.m.)

We are all aware that the spiralling cost of living has so reduced the purchasing power of the dollar that an amount considered reasonably adequate in the past has now become completely inadequate to assure the very minimum standard of living. Communications received from those on pensions of various kinds, veterans, superannuated civil servants and old age security recipients, have all emphasized the dire financial straits in which they find themselves and many of them almost pathetically plead for a little extra assistance to help them in meeting the added costs of living.

I suppose it was never envisioned that the pension was to be the whole means of livelihood, but because of conditions beyond their control many people now find themselves in the position where this is so. Unable to save from their meagre earnings throughout the

[Mr. Deputy Speaker.]

years, they must now depend on the pension cheque not to add a few extras but to provide the bare necessities of life. Thousands of others, perhaps a little more fortunate, a little more thrifty and far-sighted in some cases, thought they were providing a financial cushion in the form of investments, pension plans or annuities but now discover that the thief of inflated prices has robbed them and they as well are fighting to keep the proverbial wolf from the door. Increasing food prices, rising rents and general increases in living costs all combine to warrant an increase in pensions at this time which in fact is long overdue. Our senior citizens must not be left to live out their final years in penury, isolation and neglect.

In the foreward to the final report of the special committee of the Senate on aging reference is made to two meanings of the word "welfare" and the committee associates itself with the first which is:

—an essential activity of the community, ensuring that every citizen is able to call upon community services that he may need as a right of membership within the community.

While some explanations may be necessary in the general application of this principle, there can be no doubt about its specific application to the aging members of the community. As the legislation to follow the resolution now before us is based at least in part upon the findings of the Senate committee on aging, I should like to quote from the terms of reference of that committee:

—that a special committee of the Senate be appointed to examine the problem involved in the promotion of the welfare of the aged and aging persons, in order to ensure that in addition to the provision of sufficient income, there are also developed adequate services and facilities of a positive and preventive kind so that older persons may continue to live healthy and useful lives as members of the Canadian community and the need for the maximum co-operation of all levels of government in the promotion thereof—

I call attention to the fact that in this reference the phrase "sufficient income" is used. I believe this should constitute the objective of society in endeavouring to fulfil our responsibility to the aged and aging of our country. I do not wish to inject partisan politics into this debate except to say that in general it is the philosophy of the party to which I belong that it is the right of every citizen to share in the benefits accruing to society through the combined efforts of all our people.