

Old Age Security Act Amendment

to everybody would impose a heavy burden on the country and, as the Minister of Finance has said, it would be impossible at the present time. If the money were given to everyone it would not solve our problems.

I shall support this bill with the hope that consideration will still be given to the idea I put forward which would cover that group of people not benefiting from this bill. I hope the minister can answer my proposal. What is wrong with the idea? If there is nothing wrong with it, when can it be introduced? Adopting my plan would satisfy those people not benefiting under the Canada Pension Plan. It would give everybody an equal opportunity to take advantage of the plan.

• (8:40 p.m.)

Mr. A. D. Alkenbrack (Prince Edward-Lennox): Mr. Speaker, I join in the debate on the subject of Bill No. C-251, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act, in the belief that the Old Age Security Act certainly does need amending though not, I am convinced, along the stringent and unproductive lines proposed by the minister in the measure before us.

After looking over the thirteen pages of bureaucratic red tape set out in the 23 clauses of the bill I must conclude that the adjective "stringent" is a mild one to use when describing the way in which this legislation will treat any applicants who apply for increases in their pensions. The dreaded means test which formerly was such a blow to the personal pride of older people applying for assistance has now been revived by this Liberal government.

I am reminded of a popular song which is currently heard over television and radio in the form of a ballad. It refers to some of the woes of the human race in these modern times, and one part asks this question:

How many times can a man turn his head
Pretending he just doesn't see?

When I hear this sung I think of the refusal of the Liberal government over and over again in the last three years to do anything to alleviate the plight of the aged and the needy of this country. They turn their heads, pretending they just do not see.

There is no doubt that if this parliament as a whole were allowed to formulate a financial plan to improve the old age pension scheme and increase the pension, and if it came forward with such a plan, one which was the aggregate of our voluntary individual opinions in this house, the resulting pension legislation would be far better than that proposed

[Mr. Otto.]

by the minister under this bill. The big stumbling block in the way of justice tempered with dignity for the old people of Canada at the present time is the Liberal party. The Liberal party is the servant of big interests.

The Liberal party has only a cursory or superficial interest in the present problems of the old people of Canada. It has been interesting to hear the minister and others speaking on behalf of the government telling parliament over and over again that Bill C-251 does not contain a means test. But every clause in this measure makes stipulations which are contingent on the means of the applicant for benefit.

Let us check the dictionary and consult the definition of the word "means". The dictionary says it is the equivalent of resources, property, riches; other synonyms would properly be: wages, salaries, income. I draw the attention of hon. members to clause 10. I checked it. This long drawn-out clause has at least 55 lines delineating the terms under which senior citizens may qualify. The poor senior citizen who now receives a pittance of \$75 per month must reveal all the remainder of his private affairs in detail to this government before he can receive any supplementary amount up to \$30 per month. He would not get this increase, however badly he may need it, he cannot enjoy any of the dubious benefits of this bill unless he does exactly what the bill commands. What else does it amount to if not an investigation to test the means of applicants?

Now, Mr. Speaker, let us see what definition the dictionary gives to the word "test". The dictionary I consulted defines it as follows: "An examination or trial to prove the value or ascertain the nature of something; a method, process or means used in making such an examination or trial; a standard of criterion by which the qualities are tried; an event or set of circumstances which proves or tries a person's qualities, eligibility or qualifications. Bill C-251, an Act to amend the Old Age Security Act, certainly contains clauses which answer to these descriptions and are equivalent to a means test.

How inconsistent can this government be? During their term of office members on the treasury benches have allowed many increases in salaries all along the line without resort to legislation. They have granted many of these increases by order in council, some of them just on the word of the Prime Minister (Mr. Pearson) or by the stroke of his pen. Many of these raises were exorbitant and ill