

cannot seem to find time to deal with this question of raising the old age security pension.

An hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Mr. Knowles: I am glad to hear some support from the other side of the house. Greetings, brother.

The other feature which people cannot understand is that parliamentary interest in this question of raising the old age pension seems to have flagged from the high point it reached early in the session. Pensioners have not forgotten that on January 21 and 25 there were votes on the old age security pension having to do with raising the amount to \$100 and making it payable at the age of 65. Those votes were very close—five votes the other way could have resulted in the opposite conclusion. Rightly or wrongly, many pensioners had thought that we were very close to getting action and that it would be merely a matter of time before members of parliament would make a decision to take a further step and raise the pension. However, it seems that we are further away from an increase in old age security pension now than we were at that time. The people cannot understand the procedures which are involved in all of this. They cannot understand why we can discuss certain other things, but not pensions. What is wrong with our procedures, what is wrong with our common sense, what is wrong with our sense of responsibility, that we cannot act on this issue?

● (10:20 p.m.)

Everyone knows the ways in which things are changing in our time. Wages and salaries are going up; the standard of living is going up as well as the cost of living. The idea that people should be expected to live the rest of their days on the kind of pension they were given when they retired no longer is valid. It is no longer valid, either, that the pension should be at a level that makes it possible for people merely to stay alive. Indeed, one wonders if they can stay alive on \$75 a month. The whole approach of our society is one that recognizes the importance of old age, one that recognizes the right of older people to share in the abundance of our times, to share in our increased standard of living, which is now possible for everyone.

I say to the government that it should realize this is a field in which the people of this country expect action. In another context, we have been talking about parliament

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and what people think about it. One does not need to repeat what has been said in another debate, in fact it would be out of order to do so. However I say to the minister, to the government and to this House of Commons that one way in which we can redeem ourselves in the eyes of the people of this country would be to take action on this important issue. I hope that tonight the Minister of National Health and Welfare can answer this question by saying that favourable consideration is being given, not to something that diverts attention, not to some other way of doing it, but that the government is considering taking action to raise the old age security pension to not less than \$100 per month.

Hon. A. J. MacEachen (Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) for renewing the acquaintance we have had over the past several sessions in this general field of social policy. I congratulate him on his heightened and continued interest in this problem.

Mr. Knowles: I should like to be able to return the compliment.

Mr. MacEachen: I have not as many minutes as the hon. member had to deal with this question. I draw to his attention an address that I gave in early March in Regina in which I spent half of my time dealing with the various possible approaches to the problem of older people. It is, in a sense, a 1966 edition of the Regina manifesto, and I commend it to the hon. member for careful attention. It has all the sympathy, all the consideration and all the idealism that characterized the earlier edition of the Regina manifesto.

Seriously, however, the government is concerned. The government realizes that one of the groups in our society that will require continued support through public programs is, of course, our older citizens. As my hon. friend realizes, as the Canada Pension Plan comes into effect it will provide a decent level of retirement income for those who reach retirement age.

Mr. Knowles: Not until five or ten years from now.

Mr. MacEachen: There is a group that have not been able to contribute because they are now retired or who will not be able to contribute to earn the maximum pension.