

*Interim Supply*

the cost of living since 1952; why is it not enough? I say it is not enough for this reason. The life savings of people, their insurance and other assets, have fallen in value greatly because of the decrease in the purchasing power of the dollar. As a result of this decrease in the purchasing power of the dollar, as hon. members know, the dollar today is worth just about half what it was worth 15 years ago.

Apparently the government failed to take this fact into consideration when it gave this \$6 increase in the old age pension. I hope the party that forms the government after the coming election will review this matter and increase the amount. We have heard arguments put forward to the effect that the old age pension could not be increased because such an increase would increase inflation since it would increase spending. But as has been pointed out in this house on many occasions in the last few weeks, who is the biggest spender of all? The answer again, of course, is the government.

What would be a suitable figure to which to raise the old age pension, Mr. Chairman? There have been many opinions expressed on this. The members of the party to my left suggest \$75 a month. I am afraid I could not agree with that because I feel it is too much out of line. My own personal view, and I repeat this is my personal view, is that the amount should be raised to \$60 per month. I cannot see that this figure would be out of line in any way, and it would take into consideration the fall in the purchasing power of people's life savings since 1941 or 1942.

The other matter with respect to welfare services upon which I should like to touch is this question of the blind persons' allowance. If the old age pension is intended to supplement the lack of earning power because of a person's age, certainly the same principle should apply to blind persons. These people have lost one of their most valuable physical assets, their eyesight, and that certainly affects their earning power. I believe there should be no means test connected with the receipt of this pension. It should be a payment to compensate a person for the loss of one of his most valuable physical assets.

Another aspect of old age security and old age assistance is this question of the 20-year residence qualification. Since this country has embarked upon a very extensive immigration program, encouraging people from other countries to come here, it seems to me unfair and inconsistent to invite people to this country and then tell them they are

[Mr. Nesbitt.]

not going to get the welfare services Canadians get until they have been here for 20 years. It seems to me that is an inconsistent and unfair government policy.

There are many ways in which this particular regulation works hardship, and I refer particularly to people from the United Kingdom. I know of several cases in which people went to the United Kingdom just before the war in 1939. They were visiting friends or relatives, and they got caught there because they could not obtain return passage. There was a shortage of shipping space during the war. It is very difficult, of course, for them to prove that they applied for return passage. They would go to an office and be told, "No, we cannot give you any passage".

I have spoken to the Minister of National Health and Welfare about this and he has tried to be helpful, but as the regulations stand it is very difficult to prove that these people tried to get back. Now they have to suffer as a result. I would hope that some change could be made in these regulations at a future date.

Another aspect of welfare services concerns those who are in receipt of allowances because they are totally and permanently disabled. It is said that there are as many legal opinions as there are lawyers, and that may be true. I have found also that there are often as many medical opinions as there are doctors, and I say that with all respect to that profession. In many of these tricky, borderline cases, the question arises as to whether or not a person is permanently disabled. He may be totally disabled, but the question whether or not he is permanently disabled is one upon which we receive many opinions. For instance, in Ontario there are certain medical persons who decide whether or not a person is totally and permanently disabled. Well, that is all right. Then apparently because the federal government contributes to these pensions, the federal government have their own medical people who have to pass judgment on this question as well. If these medical people do not agree the person who requires assistance is the one who suffers. It should be one or the other. If the federal government are going to contribute they should have their own doctors do the examining, or else have it done by the province concerned.

I know of many cases in which the people concerned have asthma. Sometimes they have to go into hospital and are put into oxygen tents. They cannot work, and they are getting older all the time. Often they have to rely on the community for needed medical services, yet they cannot get this