

Old Age Security Act

Mr. Coates: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre says that we would get more done. That depends upon whether the government had the women or whether the opposition had them. If the government had the women, perhaps we would get more done. I believe that if the ladies in the opposition were as effective as the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis), there would not be enough days in the year to listen to all the complaints, many as justifiable as this one.

• (5:50 p.m.)

Mr. Speaker, on past occasions when legislation of this type was proposed I indicated that I was opposed to either a means test or a needs test. I reiterate my attitude in this regard. I believe that we ought to introduce an income ceiling or another type of system which would eliminate the investigative procedures under which people are subjected to a means or needs test by government officials, as is the case in the program with which we are now dealing. I think, Mr. Speaker, that our present system says to Canadians, "There is absolutely no value in your saving, because if you save you will merely jeopardize the kind of assistance that may be available to you from the federal government. If throughout your lifetime you contribute nothing, save nothing and become almost totally dependent upon the welfare state, you may do well. On the other hand if you work hard and contribute much, you will receive only a bare minimum from the federal government."

By giving the people of this country the great raise of 42 cents a month that is enshrined in this legislation, the government has told them, "This is your great reward." In 1957, one of the main issues in the election campaign was the two cups of coffee that the Liberal government promised if it were returned to office. At that time it did not propose increasing the old age security pension immediately from \$40 a month to \$46. The Liberal government of the day said, "We will do that after the election. If you elect us, we will give you \$6 more per month." The people of Canada did not elect the Liberals; consequently, the people received \$15 a month more. That was a fair increase.

The government is now saying to the people of Canada, "We have investigated in depth poverty in this country. We have brought down a white paper and this legislation, and on April 1 next we will act." The government says that it realizes there is difficulty now. That fact is accepted by everyone. In spite of this, it says to our people, "Even though at present there is at least \$725 million in the fund, you will have to wait until next April for any action." The people of Canada have been told that the just society which this government talks about—it talked about it a great deal during the last election campaign—will not become effective for the old age pensioners of this nation until April 1, 1971.

The need for action is evident now; it is especially necessary for many of the 1,700,000 people who are recipients of the old age security pension and the guaranteed income supplement. The government says that the supplement is not sufficient, that the \$25.75 now available

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

as an income supplement ought to be increased to \$95 a month for married couples and \$55 a month for single persons. At the same time, it says that while there is an evident need for that increase today, our people will have to wait until April 1 before they receive any increase. This is a pretty callous and heartless approach. It is not one you would adopt if you had any true feeling for those in this country who are suffering from degradation, who are being deprived of the substance of life, who are being deprived of their dignity through having to subject themselves to a needs or means test and to investigations carried out by bureaucrats. Nevertheless, that is the situation.

The rules and regulations introduced by this government that has talked about the just society are such as to suggest to people: If you live until April 1, 1971, we will see if we can put a bone with a lot of gristle and not too much meat on your table. That is about the size of it. This is being done by a government that has endeavoured to leave with our people the impression that it is concerned about them. Well, Mr. Speaker, it is not a true concern; it is a phony concern.

Mr. Bell: Hear, hear!

Mr. Coates: It is a concern that stopped on the day the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) led his party to victory in the election of 1968. The slogan "just society" never is found on the lips of Liberal supporters today. It is a forgotten slogan. They do not even mention it any more. What the just society means for the old age pensioners of this country is that there will be no action before April 1, 1971. The government says to them, "In the interim you may live the best way you know, or you may die, for that matter." If a pensioner owes as little as the \$6.20 the hon. member for Simcoe North (Mr. Rynard) mentioned, the government says, "We will sue you for the money. We will collect it from you; and if you die we will sue your estate." Apparently the government is very anxious to protect the taxpayers of this nation, even to the extent of suing the estates of pensioners for tiny amounts of money. There is not much justice and there is not much of the just society in Bill C-202, so far as I am concerned.

May I call it six o'clock, Mr. Speaker?

At six o'clock the House took recess.

AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe in too much repetition; that is not my worst vice.

Mr. Hogarth: What is your worst vice?

Mr. Stanfield: Tell us.

Mr. Gilbert: The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) has set forth the position of our