

Old Age Security Act

Unfortunately, it does happen for instance that in some families with 7 or 8 children including several still attending school—which is extremely costly—the father, aged 60 or 61, can no longer work because of his age, his lack of the necessary skills or any other reason. At that stage, he has to apply to the social welfare agency whose benefits, I repeat, are not fair, being mere handouts.

• (1250)

It is wrong to suggest, as does the Quebec Department of Social Affairs, that a couple's expenses for food, clothing and personal effects amount to \$78 only.

Mr. Speaker, it is appalling that such things happen. We should find here an opportunity of solving at least the problem of senior citizens aged 65 or more, and I wonder why the government should refrain from doing it. We would thus remedy a serious injustice and, by the same token, help the provinces which are facing empty coffers and are unable to meet the demands due to the huge number of applicants for social welfare either because they cannot find a job, or have not been employed long enough to be eligible for unemployment insurance benefits.

Mr. Speaker, I think that these suggestions are not exaggerated and that they should be seriously considered. I am ready, Mr. Speaker, to answer the question directed by the hon. member for Bonaventure-Îles de la Madeleine (Mr. Béchard).

Mr. Béchard: Mr. Speaker, I for one have ceased long ago to believe in the sincerity of the Social Credit's theory and the speech made by the hon. member for Champlain bears me out in my conviction.

I would like to ask him how he can reconcile the principle which he has expounded fairly strongly a while ago in the course of his comments, to the effect that social security should fall under the exclusive jurisdiction of the provinces, with the following statement he made in the same breath, to wit: We have advocated and still do—as our leader has stated it himself—the payment of \$1,200, \$1,800, \$3,000 and \$5,000 to senior citizens and the needy.

Could the hon. member tell us where the Creditiste logic is in such a statement?

Mr. Matte: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member loses his temper without any reason. I clearly stated in my speech that, when a government does not assume its responsibilities, something must still be done for the people. I am pretty sure that at the time the federal government decided to deal with the old age security, it was trying to palliate a difficulty at the provincial level.

I shall now answer to the second part of the question put by the hon. members, stating that social assistance falls under provincial jurisdiction. I do agree, and when we establish general standards and say that we must get a guaranteed minimum income, it is the responsibility of the federal government to co-ordinate such action throughout Canada and in every province. There is no mystery in there, and I do not understand why the hon. member finds it inconsistent.

Social security falls under provincial jurisdiction, but the federal government's part is to ensure co-ordination,

in order to do justice to all citizens of Canada. But the administration must be left to the provinces. This would be an ideal solution. We all advocate administrative decentralization so that people from every part of this country may get better service. However, we still bring in our own solutions to problems in every area. We represent the same citizens as provincial members, and we are concerned by the welfare of the people living in our respective riding, like any provincial member. At this time, we are seeking together to find appropriate solutions, either at the provincial or the federal level.

Mr. Béchard: Mr. Speaker—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice rising on a supplementary?

Mr. Béchard: No, Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

I am pleased to find that the hon. member admits that this area is under federal government jurisdiction but I would like to ask him a question.

Since he too seems upset by the pension increases mentioned in the budget statement, could he tell us if his party is considering presenting before implementation the program which his leader recently prepared in the province of Quebec so as not to interfere into this field?

Mr. Matte: Mr. Speaker, the plan prepared by our leader is included in the current program of the Social Credit Party of Canada. It is understood that, should the provinces so decide, the administration of social security programs will of course be administered by the provinces provided they keep to the basic standards set up for the country as a whole. The program of the Social Credit Party of Canada even specifies that it will be up to the provinces to decide whether they will implement it themselves or leave its administration to the central government. This is the genuine federalism which we want. We submit that each province should enjoy self-determination so as to be able to decide how they want to administer the program or have it administered by the federal government.

I repeat that there is no mystery in that and nothing illogical. We are preserving our basic principles while proposing solutions to the social problems facing all the provinces.

Hon. Jean-Luc Pepin (Minister of Industry, Trade and Commerce): Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a remark and ask a question.

If the hon. member reads what he just said, he will realize that there is a tremendous difference between his administrative decentralization and political decentralization. What he said is pure denial of federalism. It would be good thing for him to think it over and adjust his views.

My question is the same as that of the parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice (Mr. Béchard). How can there be federal jurisdiction in those sectors when the exclusiveness of provincial jurisdiction is being proclaimed?

Mr. Matte: Mr. Speaker, it is really comical since we are discussing a federal law in the federal Parliament and not