

Old Age Security Act

Mr. Speaker, the minister is in front of me and I ask him why the government refuses to lower the eligible age to 60, since, anyway, this government, as former governments, has found nothing worthwhile not only to keep people of 60 or 65 working, but above all to enable them to survive while waiting for their pension.

• (1720)

This is why the eligible age has to be lowered to 60. Another reason is that the labour market can no longer absorb all the young people who are looking for work and are qualified to fill available positions.

On the other hand, we can find on the labour market in Canada hundreds of people aged 60 or 65 who would like nothing better, after having gone through two economic crises and two wars, than to retire. Considering they have to go on working in spite of their age and their ailments, not only will they be "penalized" where unemployment insurance payments are concerned, but they will not be eligible for an old age security pension until they reach 65. Thus, those people are not only forced to keep on working, sometimes until their death, but they are also deprived of a well-deserved retirement. It is not that the labour market should get rid of those people, but it is high time that we should treat Canadians properly. Those people have done more than enough to build our country, and we now have a duty to assure them of a well-deserved retirement.

This is why we strongly request that the eligible age for old age security pensions be lowered to 60. Is it not proper that we should allow those people to enjoy a well-deserved retirement?

There is a second point with which I wanted to deal and which I am surprised to see has been overlooked. In order to make myself clear, I am going to give a very specific example. Let us suppose that a 65-year old person receives his old age pension and that, for a valid reason, he decides to stop working, or that he loses his job—considering how little job security we now have in Canada. This person comes back home and applies for an old age security pension. The maximum she can get, together with her spouse, is \$285. If she is alone and if her spouse is not entitled to it, she will draw \$150. The person being retired and her spouse not being 65, she will not be entitled to the old age security pension. So, this couple will not get \$285 a month, as is the case for a couple when both are entitled to the pension. Thus, because these persons are not both 65, they are penalized and cannot really benefit from the increase that is being announced with such noise. In this particular case, the measure cannot be efficient.

This is why we ask the government not only to consider this proposal but to act and grant an old age security pension of \$150 to any person whose age is less than what is prescribed in the present act, provided his or her spouse is entitled to it. Thus, if the husband retires and his wife is only 59 or 60, she will not have to work to keep the family afloat. This pension would enable her to retire also and live happily with her husband.

Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that this proposal is worth considering.

[Mr. Fortin.]

Mr. Cyr: Perhaps that would not be accepted by Quebec.

Mr. Fortin: The hon. member for Gaspé is saying that perhaps it would not be accepted by Quebec. My answer is that the federal government should at least consult Quebec before taking this step. We should avoid raising more constitutional issues that do not settle the matter, as it has just been done.

Quebec Social Affairs Minister Castonguay says the problem is that the federal government, in a particular sector, gives a pension which results in financial difficulties for those who support the retired people and that the government of Quebec, despite its illimited spending capacity, cannot solve the problem and has therefore a feeling of frustration.

Many of these problems could be avoided if we would agree to give \$150 a month to the spouse of those who will get the old age pension at 65, unless we bring the eligibility age down to 60 as we would like. We could avoid many problems and allow this couple to live decently.

Finally, the third proposal that we also defend strongly is the following; according to the provisions of Bill C-207, the old age pension that will be granted by the government is ridiculous even if it includes a supplement geared to the cost of living. This means inquiries, forms to be filled, correspondence, administrative intrigue, in one word more bureaucracy. There is already enough of that, not only as far as the government is concerned but also for the population in general.

We suggest that we should quit bothering people and start really helping them by granting the basic amount to each elderly person in one monthly \$200 payment. I understand that some members will object that the government does not have enough money to give \$200 a month to the elderly.

Mr. Speaker, with the \$150 the government intends to give them, these people will not be able to live any better. By giving them \$200 a month, they would have enough minimum income security to meet their legitimate needs.

Where would the money come from, Mr. Speaker? Today, it costs over \$13,500 million, unless I am mistaken, to finance the federal, provincial and municipal welfare programs. And most of that money is spent in administrative costs. Those amounts are therefore not paid to the people for whom they are intended. That may seem unbelievable to some of my colleagues. Yet, I invite them to consider the fact that to finance the guaranteed income supplement, the old age security pensions, the allowances to the blind and the disabled, the program for the professional rehabilitation of the disabled, manpower mobility, adult training allowances, student grants, assistance to the immigrants, clearing up of the downgraded zones, veterans's pensions, Indian and Eskimo affairs, welfare services, research, all those services cost \$1,097 million, of which no Canadian sees a single penny. That, Mr. Speaker, proves that we have reached the point where bureaucracy dominates the legislature and the government.

• (1730)

That is why we say this must cease, that the problem should be settled once and for all by giving people direct-