

• (2010)

It is our view that the best way to handle this problem is not by applying a means or needs test but, rather, by paying the pension universally and then adjusting the tax system in such a way that those who are in the upper income brackets and do not need the money pay it all back. So long as you apply a needs or income test you will create the situation in which there is a division between those who have just enough and those who do not even have enough to get by. We suggest that is not fair.

I say to the minister that he need not offer any word of apology for adding the full amount of this increase to the basic pension paid under the Old Age Security Act. One of the reasons we are prepared to vote for this bill is that, for the first time in several years, we are seeing an increase in that basic amount. In other words, we are moving a little more in the direction of universality than has been the case with respect to the last several amendments to the Old Age Security Act.

It is still my view, despite all the reviews, papers, reports and so on which have been written on the subject, that the best piece of social legislation our parliament ever passed was the bill in 1951 that provided for old age security to be paid on a universal basis, beginning in 1952. I regret very much that the Liberal party which brought in that piece of legislation—granted, it was prodded to do it—has since then retreated from that principle. So, Mr. Speaker, we welcome the aspect of this piece of legislation that moves us toward the universal approach. We hope that there will be further steps in this direction.

I spoke earlier today about the pension situation which existed when I first came to this House some 30 years ago. Not only have we increased the basic amount of the pension fivefold and done other things; we have achieved the acceptance in Canada of a new philosophy about pensions. Pensions are no longer regarded as a form of charity, something that you give to people to enable them to keep body and soul together for the few years they may still live after leaving the treadmill. Rather, we now look on pensions as a right. We now believe that individuals have the right to retire at a decent age and to enjoy something of the good life they have helped to make possible through their years of hard work in this country. I hope we will not go back on that approach to pensions, back to any concept of charity or welfare.

I shall now move to another phase of the question on which the minister touched at length this afternoon, that is, the question of our doing something for persons below the age of 65, particularly those who are between 60 and 65. I say to the minister and to the government that although we were disappointed because the basic amount of pension was not increased to, say, \$125 or \$150, we were equally disappointed, a bit surprised—almost shocked—to see when we examined this bill that there was nothing in it to break through that floor of 65 years of age.

As the minister said this afternoon and as we all know, the greatest pressure for something to be done in this area is exerted by those who sit on his side of the House. He knows very well that the members of his own party are constantly pressing him on this point. There is no reason why I should not single out a particular group of members who are exerting this pressure, and I commend them for

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doing so. The Quebec members of his party feel very strongly that people between 60 and 65 years of age should be paid a pension. If the government is not prepared to give the pension to everyone between 60 and 65, there is, none the less, tremendous support by hon. members on his side of the House for the proposition that the spouse who is between 60 and 65 should get the pension—

An hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):—if the other person is already in receipt of the old age pension.

Mr. Alexander: I agree with that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I gather from the applause of hon. members that there is support for that proposition from all parties in this House.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I was disappointed that nothing was done to lower the pensionable age in one of two ways, either by lowering it universally to 64, 63, 62, 61 and on down to 60—and I would not mind an employment test being applied to any pension that might be payable at that age—or by introducing some vehicle for providing the pension to the younger spouse in cases where the other spouse is already in receipt of the pension.

I listened with interest and attention to the minister's discussion on this subject this afternoon. I think there is a good deal to be said for his argument that we must think about all the areas of need affecting people below age 65. It is not just a case of looking at those between 60 and 65; we must be concerned about those, in need who are below that age. I firmly support the idea of the federal-provincial conference that will discuss the entire problem of welfare, income security and income maintenance. If I may say so, I felt on two or three occasions this afternoon, as I have felt in the past, a sense of determination displayed by the minister. I think he wants to move in this field. He has our blessing. We wish him well. I only hope that the conference in April, 1973, will not mean that papers will be produced for action in 1975 or 1977. I hope there will be action in these areas this year, in 1973. I wish *Hansard* could record the fact that the minister is nodding his head up and down.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: He is not denying it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Even though it is true that we must do something to meet the needs of the poor of all ages, I do not think it is fair to lump those between 60 and 65 with the rest of the population. We dare to hope that persons who are in their thirties, forties and fifties and who are in economic trouble will be helped in ways other than putting them on an old age pension. We hope that there will be jobs for them, or rehabilitation or economic programs that will give them the chance to live the good life that is to be lived in Canada. However, if a person is over 60 and is in economic trouble, his chances