

Old Age Security Act

maintain an adequate income. Surely, we could at least have brought those past 60 into pension entitlement, provided the husband or the wife had reached the qualifying age of 65.

I am only underlining the inadequacy of this bill. I think, to sum up, that to correct this injustice, the government—and I do not see how government members on the other side can argue as they do—should have made this cost of living adjustment apply back to the date the legislation was first brought in and make it available to a spouse who is over 60 but not yet 65, and included that cost of living adjustment for those who are entitled to the guaranteed income supplement. This applies to all pensioners. There is no single group of Canadian people who are so adversely affected by the inflationary situation which concerns us as those we are attempting to deal with justly in this legislation. Anything short of this is injustice; anything short of this is irresponsible.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I realize that when I took part in this debate on second reading on May 10 I announced the date of the forthcoming federal election as July 17. I did not realize that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) had now gone to Government House and got the actual dissolution. But listening to some of the speakers this afternoon, especially the speech of the hon. member for Papineau (Mr. Ouellet), I am beginning to wonder whether we are already on the hustings.

An hon. Member: Take your time.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): An hon. member tells me to take my time. Well, there is only half an hour left in this debate. I do not intend to take all of it; I shall take only a few minutes, so that others who may wish to speak will have an opportunity to do so.

It is still my very strong view, Mr. Speaker, that the pensioners of Canada want the basic old age security pension raised to a figure of not less than \$150 a month, and it is my view that they have the right to expect parliament to raise the basic pension to that amount. We feel, also, that along with a basic old age security pension of \$150 a month there should be the kind of changes in the Income Tax Act which would take the money back from those in the upper income brackets. We insist that this is the way to do it. It is not conducive to a society of equals, it does not lessen our being a country of haves and have-nots, to continue a practice of applying a needs or income test before the rate of a person's pension is fixed. So we take our stand very strongly for \$150 old age security pension with the necessary tax changes to make sure that the wealthy pay it back. We also feel there should be an escalation provision better than the new one which is provided in the bill before us. We welcome the one provided in Bill C-207, because it is better than the old one with its two per cent ceiling, but we still feel there should be an escalation provision which would make it possible for retired people not only to keep up with the rising cost of living but to share in the rising standard of living which they in their working years helped to make possible.

It is our view, despite the argument advanced a few minutes ago by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minis-

ter of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Ouellet), that pensions under the Old Age Security Act and the Canada Pension Plan should be available at the age of 60 to all those who are prepared to leave the labour market or who are already out of the labour market. I hope it is clear that in the latter phrase I include wives of pensioners where wives are younger than the present pension age.

I agree with those who argue that some kind of provision should be made for spouses and this seems to fill the need, by making it possible for those who are a few years younger, to receive the pension if the breadwinner is also drawing the old age pension. The arguments which have been advanced against this today, and on previous occasions by the hon. member for Papineau and others, do not convince me. We think these are reasonable provisions which ought to be enacted. Some day we shall have to take these steps. We think they should be taken now.

As for this bill, Bill C-207, it does contain a few things that are good. There is nothing in it that is bad. The trouble is, there is so little in it that is good. All it does is provide for an escalation in relation to the rise in the cost of living. No account is taken of the gross national product or the rising standard of living, and it is calculated in relation to a basic pension which is already inadequate. If the hon. member for Papineau and others on that side of the House intend to take credit on the hustings for the principle of escalation, let them realize that they will be facing many old age pensioners to whom an escalation formula of this kind is no help because the basic pension itself is too low. That is what is wrong with this bill. It does not go far enough. As I say, it does provide something. It puts the escalation back on the basic \$80, and it provides for an increase in the guaranteed income supplement both to single and to married couples. The bill is also drawn in such a way that perhaps for the first time in old age pension history, if my memory serves me correctly, payments are to be made retroactive.

• (1540)

Elections are wonderful, Mr. Speaker. Usually these increases do not come into effect until after two or three months have gone by, but with the prospect of an election on July 17, the bill has been drawn in such a way that there will be a six months retroactive increase in the cheques to be received by our pensioners at the the end of June. Nevertheless, even though on a former occasion I have called that what it is, if any money is going to get through to these people I think it should get through to them as soon as possible. This is why I regret that this House did not pass the bill yesterday, as I think we could have done and as I believe we should have done. I hope that any suggestion that the ladies and gentlemen of what is sometimes called the "other place" will hold up the bill is false.

In any event, I have indicated our position on the question of the old age pension, namely that we think it should be a basic pension of \$150 a month, with the other provisions to which I have referred. By way of contrast, the position of the government, the Liberal party, is that it is good enough to have a basic pension of \$80, escalated from the point, and to take care of those who need more by an income or needs test system. That is their position; they are prepared to go to the country on it and to ask the