

Old Age Security Act

[English]

Mr. Arnold Peters (Timiskaming): Mr. Speaker, we have all been sitting here tonight in the hope that this piece of legislation will pass. I think there are thousands of Canadians who are as interested in the passage of this legislation as in anything else we might do. The fact is, we propose to give to each of the elderly persons in this country an extra \$13.39 every month. Our great interest in this sum of money, and the necessity for this increase, is an indication of the plight in which the aged find themselves.

Our rules do not allow us to do some quite ordinary things. It would seem to me there are a number of things we should collectively be able to do but which we have not been able to do tonight because of the rules governing this House. Every member who has been here for any length of time is aware that if we increase the old age pension by \$13.39 we are really providing very little of substance on which a family may live. Everyone is aware of the difficulty which arises when a husband is two or three years older than his wife, and dependent entirely upon the old age pension plus the guaranteed income supplement for sustenance. That means we will now give them a total sum of \$170.14.

• (2240)

The Creditistes have at least tried their best but have been ruled out of order, and I have no complaint about that. But in this House tonight is the minister responsible for this department. He could easily get into his car and go through the archaic procedure of making a journey to the Governor General and getting the recommendation changed so as to add one or two simple provisions to the bill, provisions that would be of immense benefit to the senior citizens of this country. But he sits there asking that the bill be passed.

Are not the elderly people of this country in a pitiful state when whether they get along or do not get along depends upon keeping this government in power in order to provide them with a measly \$13.39, be they single or married? It seems to me that one of the things we could have done was to make an allowance for women who are 61, 62 or 63 and obviously are not capable of earning additional income. We have already established that they would be unable to earn very much anyway because of the ceiling. They have to get along on \$170.14, and we call ourselves civilized. We hide behind the Governor General's recommendation. I think this is a disgrace and the government should not be the least bit proud.

Some hon. member asked what we would do. I am not very good at arithmetic, but we said that we would give \$150 to the senior citizens of this country. If you add to that the guaranteed income supplement, this will bring them up to about \$240. Multiplied by 12 this produces a yearly income of \$2,880. Many of our senior citizens are now trying to get by on that income. The government has not suggested that it will place a freeze on the rents and shelter costs of these elderly people; nothing of that sort has been done, though it is within our power to do it.

We have agreed to sit extra hours tonight since no one knows whether this parliament will exist two or three days from now. We are making an extreme effort, and for

[Mr. Lambert (Bellechasse).]

what? For \$13.39, an amount which quite often is divided between two people. Already the minister, who has some potential, is playing the game of "How cheaply can we get votes? How much do we have to spend? Let us divide this \$13.39 between two people, and perhaps we will get both their votes".

I agree with another of the amendments which was proposed but ruled out of order because it did not meet the recommendation of the Governor General. Let us not kid ourselves about this; the Governor General has given no particular input to this resolution. This is a cabinet decision made out in the open, and it is strictly a question of: "How much can we get away with? What is the least that we can provide?" I say we should reduce the pensionable age to 60, and I suggest that this be done one year at a time, as we did in reducing the eligible age from 70 to 65. I also suggest 55 as the age of voluntary retirement.

I am also aware that the minister must give consideration to another matter. Although the proposal will cost the Canadian people money, it will be of considerable benefit to every citizen. The minister will either have to pay some attention to it, or he will find that the elderly people of this country, who now receive a small pittance through the Horizons for the Aged program, will have to investigate this problem of retirement. It seems to me that if we do not retire people at a younger age, that is, if we do not move the age down to 60 and then down to 55, we will not be able to provide jobs for people in the 25 to 30 age bracket. If we do this, we will pretty soon have to commence an educational program for retired people that will encourage them by the knowledge that when they retire they will not be placed on the shelf waiting to die. They will know there are things they can do in retirement, for themselves and for the country, which will not interfere with the economic structure of our nation.

We must be in very bad shape in this country; frankly, I believe we must be in very bad shape in this parliament if we cannot implement the ideas of, I am sure, all members of this House in respect of reducing the age at which people may retire. We must be in pretty bad shape if we cannot provide for the person who quite often is forced to depend upon the breadwinner who merely has a pension on which to live. We have not been able to come up with a solution to that problem.

The minister can sit there and talk to his colleagues or do whatever he likes, but it seems to me that we should be able to do something about some of these questions which have been ruled out of order tonight. If we do not do something about these matters pretty soon, we will not be fulfilling our duty. I do not intend to make a long speech. We seem to have been playing politics year after year in respect of the treatment of old age pensioners. This year they are to receive an increase of \$13.39 a month. I have seen the figure at \$6. I saw it at \$10 in another election. At one period I saw it at \$2 odd. I believe at another time they received \$15 in a roundabout way. I do not think we should use the old age pensioners as an election tool. We should consciously face up to these problems which all members recognize.

I have a problem. I would like to know what other members tell a man who says he will have to leave his wife because they cannot get along on his old age pension. I am speaking of a man who says that he must leave his