

*Old Age Security Act*

Anyone listening to that speech might have been led to believe that the government contemplated no changes in the old age security legislation. If we were to believe the minister, the 2 per cent maximum cost of living increase to the guaranteed income supplement was more than adequate because he said, again on March 23, as recorded in *Hansard* at page 1105, that the 2 per cent cost of living increase—

—is proving to have the tendency to keep reasonably in line with increases in the cost of living.

Suddenly, between March 23 and May 8, the minister has discovered that old age pensioners deserve a better break and a more just cost of living increase on their benefits, just as we argued on March 23. Perhaps the minister found so much sympathy within the Liberal party for the Conservative party's motion that he had to work hard to incorporate the proposal into his party's platform just to stem the tide of those in his party who objected.

Consistency has never been one of the Liberal government's better attributes nor one of the Minister's strong points. From now on, whenever I or any of my colleagues ask the minister a question or press him for some reform and he gives a negative reply, we shall be confident that our request will be Liberal government policy within about six weeks—perhaps a little longer if an election does not appear imminent. The inconsistency and the cynicism of this Liberal government makes one wonder. First they bring in and then act on a white paper that shaves off the old age pension at \$80 a month, with no cost of living increase guaranteed. Then more than two years later, when the nearness of an election makes it politically expedient, they belatedly promise a cost of living increase to these deserving old people.

Obviously, the polls have the government so terrorized that what we are witnessing today is a deathbed conversion. A conversion is better late than never, but I remind the government that few deathbed conversions have saved the dying patient's life, and this late move is unlikely to save a dying Liberal government.

There were three changes in pension legislation announced in the budget speech of the finance minister on May 8, 1972. These three changes were: first, to escalate the basic old age security pension by the full increase in the consumer price index, effective January 1, 1972; second, to increase the maximum guaranteed income supplement by \$15 per person as of January 1, 1972, with full escalation after April 1, 1973; third, to escalate veterans pensions and allowances by the full increase in the consumer price index, effective January 1, 1972. These changes are a welcome but belated recognition of the needs of Canada's aged and veterans. But because these needs are so late in being recognized by the government, the measures proposed do not even begin to make up the ground lost in the last few years.

First of all, the failure of this government to escalate the basic old age pension according to increases in the cost of living from the time they first came into power is depriving old age pensioners of a healthy sum of money each month. If the Liberal government had actually embarked on its promises and the goal of a just society which it promised in 1968, it would have arranged for old age

security pensions and guaranteed income supplements to be increased yearly at a rate corresponding to the annual rise in the cost of living.

If such a plan had been instituted, then the 1967 old age security pension would have risen by a fair margin by 1972. Old age pensioners, therefore, should have been receiving on January 1, 1972, much more than the \$82.88 the government is now offering them with retroactive magnanimity. I will move an amendment to this effect at the end of my short speech.

Second, the change in the guaranteed income supplement, a program wildly hailed by Liberal government members as the answer to poverty among the aged, still will not bring Canada's poverty stricken up to the 1971 poverty line. Consider, for example, the single, old age pensioner whose income is less than \$24 a year and who is therefore eligible for the maximum guaranteed income supplement. He will now receive a total annual income from old age security, the guaranteed income supplement and his own sources, of \$1,834 to \$1,858. But the poverty line for a single person in 1971 was \$2,013. Therefore, the government is still guaranteeing poverty for Canada's aged now receiving the maximum supplement, by keeping their annual income from \$155 to \$179 below last year's poverty line. At least 27.3 per cent of all Canada's old age pensioners, involving 481,451 individuals, will be kept in this guaranteed annual poverty position.

Third, the change in the guaranteed income supplement legislation will be of no benefit to Canada's veterans who are in receipt of the guaranteed income supplement, for whatever additional money they receive through the guaranteed income supplement will be deducted from their veterans pension. The \$15 they receive from the Department of National Health and Welfare will be deducted from the pension they have been receiving from the Department of Veterans Affairs. Nowhere in his budget did the finance minister estimate the savings to the federal government as a result of the \$15 a month lowering of veterans pensions to Canada's aged veterans. I imagine that the minister's attitude is sunshine budget now, tears later.

With regard to veterans, the single veteran over 65 years of age is now eligible to receive \$161 a month. With the increase of \$15, an aged person who is 65 years of age and not a veteran would be receiving only \$150. So he will lose that \$15. At the same time, the married veteran whose spouse is also over 65 years of age is now getting \$271. He will get an increase of only \$14, which is what the wife would receive anyway as an old age citizen.

These three criticisms of the Liberal government's new look for old age pensioners are important ones on which I expect the minister to act within seven weeks, if his past record of requiring seven weeks for conversion to Progressive Conservative ideals and suggestions continues. We also await anxiously his promised introduction of the New Horizons for the Aged policy mentioned in the budget speech. Perhaps in this new policy the Minister of National Health and Welfare will recognize that in addition to being voters who have urgent needs, the aged are human beings and Canadians who want to participate fully in our society.