

Old Age and Veterans' Pensions

street in a town in my riding, I met an old man about 85 years of age or so. He had immigrated to this country in the 1920's settled on the land and farmed about a half section, using up most of his physical and emotional energy in so doing. Finally, he retired after buying a small house in a small town. He is a tall, thin fellow with a bald head and a heavy handlebar moustache; I suppose the moustache was partly an effort to make up for the lack of hair on top of his head.

An hon. Member: A lot of people do that.

● (4:50 p.m.)

Mr. Yewchuk: That is right. He stopped me and had a very sad story to tell. He had spent all his years on the land and retired into town where he was occupying a small house on a grand pension of \$110. When you consider the cost of maintenance of a house, the payment of taxes and utilities, the purchase of groceries, etc., you realize that it does not take long to spend \$110. The basic pension together with the guaranteed income supplement, in no way covers the cost of living. I listened to him for some time. He told me that he had obtained a small job for a few days somewhere and earned a small amount of money. The authorities involved found this out and deducted around \$30 from his guaranteed income supplement. He gave me a slogan that I had not heard before. It goes like this: "Liberale meni chobuti wid-dibrle". The translation is: "The Liberals took my boots away".

This is only one story. A few days ago I met another man. He came to my office complaining about the same thing. He happens to be a man of 65 who receives a pension at the rate which I described previously. His wife is only 55, however, and this meant that when he retired two people had to live on a pension of \$110 a month. She was not old enough to qualify for the old age pension, so the only choice she had was to go on welfare or go to work. She opted for the second choice and she went to work as a cook in a bush camp. This fact was immediately noted by the authorities, and again the guaranteed annual income supplement was cut off. In addition, she had to pay some income tax.

I go home fairly frequently and there is another man who comes to my office once a month. He has done so for the past two years. He has asked me the same question 24 times in two years: "When will the old age pension go up?" All three of these people have asked

me what I can do for them and whether I can see to it that their pensions go up a bit. I say that I will do my best to see that the pension goes up, knowing full well that anything I can do, judging by the response of this government in the past two years, will amount to a big zero. I realize that this speech will have the same effect on the government, but I decided to make it anyway in the hopes that somebody would listen. I notice that the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) is not listening. That is a habit of his. He never listens to any of these speeches on these very important issues that are raised on opposition days. As a matter of fact, it appears to me that government members scoff at opposition days. They look at them as a necessary evil or a concession they had to make in our rule changes, and they consider them as not worthy of attention. I am very sorry that this is the attitude of the government to opposition days because these are the days when the most pressing problems that face the country are usually discussed. These are the problems which should receive top priority but, by a stroke of the hand of fate, seem to be relegated to areas that will not receive consideration from this government.

This question of pensions for the elderly is a very serious one. In the fifth annual review of the Economic Council of Canada, which was carried out in 1961, the following poverty lines were established: \$1,500 a year for a single person and \$2,500 a year for a couple. These figures were revised in 1968 to \$1,800 for a single person and \$3,000 for a couple. In 1970 they were revised again to about \$1,950 for a single person and \$3,250 for a couple. If we look at the pension that people actually get we find that, in the case of a single individual, by adding the basic pension of \$79.58 per month to the guaranteed income supplement of \$31.83 per month we arrive at a grand total of \$1,336.92 per year. When we compare that to \$1,950, which is defined as the poverty line, we can see that individuals in this area are living on a level far below the acceptable poverty line. If we look at the pension of a couple, assuming they are both 65 and both receive pension, we find that their combined income is around \$2,673.84 a year, which again is far below the \$3,250 which is considered acceptable by the Economic Council of Canada.

These two examples do not cover the whole gamut. As a matter of fact, these examples miss a very important aspect of old age pensions. This important aspect relates to the fact