

Old Age Security Act Amendment

people are thinking across this country and I say to the minister, who has just gone out to stretch his legs and stand behind the curtain, that he had better reconsider this measure if he wants to get any political advantage from it. The people do not want any semblance of a means test imposed on them. He would be far better to reduce the amount so that the \$225 million would cover everybody equally.

The minister mentioned last July that the amount of \$225 million was going to be set aside for the purpose of paying the old age pensioners \$30 a month. Some of us know that there are in this country about 1,200,000 old age pensioners. With sharp pencils an hon. member in the N.D.P. ranks and myself did some quick figuring and on a monthly basis we arrived at a figure of \$18 to \$20. I immediately rose and asked the minister how he was going to spread \$225 million among 1,200,000 people and not impose a means test. The minister would not admit it was a means test. No, he had something else in mind. I asked him whether he was trying to pull the wool over the eyes of our old people and he did not even smile as he is smiling now. He thinks it is funny, but if he would talk to the elderly people they would soon tell him how funny it is. He is fooling no one but himself and some of the members of the Liberal party.

The application of a means test is vicious. It is something foreign to the Canadian way of life. It is something which has been put into effect in the case of war veterans receiving veterans allowances, burnt-out pensioners, and in many cases many war veterans would be much better off if it could have been handled without a means test.

Let me tell the minister as a member of parliament that I have handled many cases of people who have supplemented their income and had it deducted from their pensions. They in turn have felt this was unfair, and in many cases it caused hardship. We are now getting to the point where the minister of health is going to have a building full of bureaucrats whose function it will be to check the incomes of our old age pensioners. How is the minister going to smile this off? He cannot, simply because the old age pensioners know that if 1,200,000 of them are going to be called upon to fill in a piece of paper and state their incomes a tremendous staff will be required to check their statements. If the minister also requires staff to check the eligibility of these pensioners for this supplementary benefit under the act, he will also require staff with legal training and all the rest of it.

Other hon. members have pointed out that certain old age pensioners will not get this supplementary benefit simply because they have reported a meagre amount of additional income. They may be living alongside others who do receive it, and this will create a feeling of bitterness on the part of the people who are denied the additional supplement of \$30. They will say: "That so-and-so got it and I didn't".

If part of some extra earnings in the amount of \$200 or \$300 for which they have worked hard is deducted, then the pensioner who has earned this money may on a subsequent occasion omit this item when he fills out a form of application. The minister will make liars out of our old age pensioners. Any minister in this house who insists on legislation of this sort when members of his own party remind him of the points I am now trying to make is embarking upon a course which is not justified.

Instead of paying all this money to bureaucrats he would do better to pay the extra money to the old age pensioners and bring their payments up the amount suggested by the Senate committee as the required amount to meet today's cost of living. The minister would do far better to make a \$25 payment across the board to all old age pensioners. If this were done it would be unnecessary to have a building full of bureaucrats checking the records of the old age pensioners and looking over their shoulders to see how much income they have.

The minister above anybody else ought to know that this sort of thing is foreign to the Canadian way of life. Therefore, why does he go ahead with this bill and be stupid? Why does the minister insist on something which is not Canadian? I ask the minister to come to his senses and to bring in a bill which will pay an across-the-board amount to the pensioners without a means test. We would not need in that event a building full of bureaucrats, and the old folks would not be penalized or caused to make statements which might be against their own conscience just because they wanted to receive the extra \$30 a month.

● (9:40 p.m.)

This, Mr. Speaker, the minister is bringing upon himself. He is not supported in it by the members of his party because they know differently. Anyone who has moved among the people as I have during the past week would be firmly convinced more than ever before that the minister is fundamentally wrong in adopting what he chooses to call a needs test.