

Old Age Security

are worthy of better treatment than they are receiving in the measure now before us.

Mr. John L. Skoberg (Moose Jaw): Mr. Speaker, in taking part in the debate on second reading of Bill C-202 may I say that I think the first thing all Canadians and all Members of Parliament should realize is that the greatness of this country naturally stems from our senior citizens. I believe that too often in the past some of our young people in society, including myself, have not really looked the way they should upon the senior citizen and particularly the message they are trying to get across to us in respect of their rights in society.

President Nyerere of Tanzania made very clear in some of his essays on Socialism the contribution the senior people in his country are making and will be making. I believe that we are not living up to the meaning contained in the words of President Nyerere in respect of the part our senior citizens have played. We seem to have a situation in which we deliberately try to divide and conquer this group in our society.

This bill provides a basic \$80 a month with no consideration for escalation, and yet we see that the government is proposing an escalation clause in respect of the supplements. In our society it is not right that one group of people should be treated differently from others. If the payment of \$80 is included in the bill, an escalation clause should be included to bring it into line with other portions of the bill. It is difficult to understand why the government considers that \$80 a month should be the basic amount, when the Economic Council of Canada has stated that the minimum should be \$150 a month.

If we expect to have an equitable distribution of wealth in this country, these people should have part of it. We do not seem to realize what is entailed in a planned economy, although we do realize that we should have such an economy. There is no reason to suggest that it is not necessary to take money from a particular segment of society in order to provide for our senior citizens.

In this bill a provision has been deliberately made whereby some people in society will receive only the \$80 a month basic pension and will not be entitled to any type of increase. These people will look upon those who will receive the supplement as being in a different situation. I suggest it is not too late for the government to at least make the bill a little more palatable by including an escalation clause in respect of the small amount of \$80 which has been suggested. I am certain that before the bill leaves the committee, consideration will be given to this suggestion. If the government indicates that it is prepared to do something about this matter right now, the length of time the bill will be considered by the Standing Committee will be greatly reduced.

There is a realization of the state of poverty which becomes more acute as time goes on. We should realize that these people who have set aside a small amount of money are entitled to recognition. We must realize that the people who will receive only the basic amount of \$80

[Mr. Hales.]

a month will be faced with property taxes which are increasing by 50 per cent in some areas. We know, for example, that some property taxes in Ottawa have risen by 25 per cent in the last year.

With the system of taxation we have at this time, we know that costs will not go down and that people who own property will be obligated, and rightfully so, to pay the property tax. I suggest that if we are to give any consideration to our senior citizens who wish to retain their homes, the property tax must be paid in some other way. I know of many cases throughout the country and in my constituency where people have had to give up their homes because they have been unable to pay the property taxes. I am certain that this 14-cent increase will not enhance their financial position in so far as their home is concerned.

● (5:00 p.m.)

It seems to me that we must accept some kind of equality. I do not think the bill before us can possibly be called the rule of law and equality for this nation. At the present time the law of this nation is dictated by the Liberal government and they will have to stand trial for subjecting these people to such a low basic old age pension. I am sure there is a method whereby the government and this House could redistribute the wealth in this country to bring equality to the citizens of Canada so they can be proud of being Canadian. I am sure we have all seen situations in the past where wage increases have been based on a certain percentage. This, again, accentuates the difference between the haves and the have-nots.

I think departments of government should consider the escalator clause, as they have with regard to other increases which were based on the cost of living. Surely the government can accept this principle and include in the basic amount an escalator provision which would make the assistance more consistent with the cost of living. Also, the 2 per cent provided by the government is far from sufficient. I am sure that the DBS figures reflect the situation as it exists so far as the equitable distribution of wealth is concerned.

We know that people living on old age assistance, and even those subsisting on the basic amount, continue to be confronted by the same situation as everyone else in the country; but they have no way of stretching their dollar to offset the high cost of medicines, for example. They have no means of taking in some of the entertainment to which they should be entitled, unless there is an escalation in the basic amount of pension which they receive. If the government is suggesting that there should not be a basic pension—in effect that is what they are saying in the bill before us—they should come out and say so, instead of saying they are going to divide our society into two groups and give some people a little increase while others will not be considered.

I hope that when this bill goes to committee, senior citizens and their organizations will be heard and the government will pay attention to their representations. I hope all Members of Parliament will realize that we must recognize these people as being members of the