

*Old Age Security Act*

go to the wealthy province of Ontario and say to the premier of that province with whom they have very close contact, "Let us do in Ontario exactly the same as they did in British Columbia."

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Whicher:** Don't come crying here and telling us what you did years ago when you gave the magnificent sum of \$65 a month. Go to the province of Ontario and tell it to make the same deal as British Columbia.

**Mr. Lewis:** Don't forget Alberta.

**Mr. Whicher:** Very good; I won't forget Alberta. As a matter of fact, I have it in my speech later on. I will use Alberta in a rather different fashion.

Let no one underestimate this achievement, Mr. Speaker. It has been secured after a long and, from a parliamentary point of view, rather complicated process. It reflects the consensus of this House, over time, on the priority that we attach to the needs of those who built this country, our fathers and mothers and the grandfathers and grandmothers of those who now harvest the fruits of their great endeavours. As a Canadian I am proud to say that Canada is the first country in the world that has provided this order of protection to its aged. Not just the Liberal government, that introduced this legislation, should take pride in it: we have three other very responsible parties in this House and it is a fact that all of the parties working together made this legislation our number one priority to assist our senior citizens. We should be proud of that fact.

This afternoon the minister attempted to compare Canada with other countries such as Sweden, France and Germany. It is very difficult to do that. Last night I took the opportunity to compare Canada with various countries. I repeat that it is very difficult. While the figures must be reasonably rough, nevertheless it is a fact that so far as looking after senior citizens is concerned, we are the number one nation in the world. In the wealthiest country in the world, the United States, approximately 5 per cent of its citizens, if they retire at age 65 because of sickness or some unfortunate catastrophe, are not covered by social security. They must go on relief, which is paid for by the state or the U.S. treasury. How different from the situation here in Canada where a couple living anywhere from Newfoundland to Vancouver can retire at age 65 and, if they have no money, automatically from now on, starting in April, receive a cheque for \$325 a month!

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Whicher:** Canada is one of the first countries in the world to legislate to provide that its pensioners, as a matter of right, without reference to contributions that they may or may not have made to a pension plan and without reference to a means or needs test, shall be guaranteed an income which will permit them to live their declining years with security and dignity.

As a Liberal as well as a Canadian, I applaud the contribution which has been made toward the final achievement of this goal by such eminent predecessors of the present incumbent of the National Health and Welfare portfolio as the Hon Brooke Claxton, the Hon. Paul

[Mr. Whicher.]

Martin, the Hon. Judy LaMarsh, the Hon. Allan MacEac-hen and the Hon. John Munro, all of whom had a great deal to do with the legislation that has come before us today. We should be proud of them. It has been said that one may judge the moral fibre of a nation by the way it takes care of themselves. No Canadian need fear the application of this standard to his country, and no Liberal should be ashamed of the contribution of this government.

Other things have also been done for our senior citizens, Mr. Speaker. The income tax exemption for our senior citizens was \$650 at age 70. In the tax reform legislation which we introduced last year that exemption was increased to \$1,000 and the qualifying age lowered to 65 years, so that anyone getting the guaranteed income supplement would no longer have to pay income tax in Canada. There are those on the other side of this chamber, particularly in the NDP, who have asked why we should increase the old age security pension rather than the guaranteed income supplement. Mr. Speaker, in passing this legislation the House is reaffirming the position it took in 1952 when it decided, for the first time in Canadian history, to recognize the contribution which our senior citizens have made to the growth and current prosperity of the country by providing a universal benefit.

Some 21 years ago this House removed all conditions which had hitherto attached to the old age pension, and gave it to all pensioners as a matter of right. No one in the House at the time thought it was sufficient to meet all the needs of retired persons, and some who are still here today said so in no uncertain terms. For some of those who had other income, it lifted them from insecurity to security. For those who had little or no other income, it was not enough and required supplementation. For those who had plenty of other income—this was not, and still is not, characteristic of the vast majority of retired Canadians—this was a payment made by a grateful country to those whose labours had built it into a strong and prosperous nation. It was to be theirs as a matter of right.

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As a nation we have prospered much since 1952 when the OAS payment was \$40. Since then we have turned increasingly to the problem of the relief of poverty. In the retired group, the guaranteed income supplement which was introduced in 1967 put pensioners on the high road to the achievement of a guaranteed income at a level which meets their needs without attacking their dignity. The legislation before us, despite the charges of inadequacy, removes all pensioners except those with very special needs from the welfare rolls of this country. I do not regret our concern in recent years for increasing application of the principle of selectivity in the utilization of our welfare dollar to meet the needs of those in poverty. But in our zeal to improve the lot of the very poor we have turned our backs in recent years on the commitment we made in 1952. Let those of us who share unabashedly in the wealth of this country compare our monthly pay cheques in 1952 with those we receive today. And when we have done so, let us ask ourselves whether we think it is inappropriate, or immoral, to restore the purchasing