

Proceedings on Adjournment Motion

SOCIAL SECURITY—GUARANTEED ANNUAL INCOME—OLD AGE PENSION COST OF LIVING BONUS—CHANGES IN CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Doug Rowland (Selkirk): Mr. Speaker, on Monday, November 30, as reported at page 1582 of *Hansard*, I asked the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) whether he would make representations to the provincial governments in connection with the advisability of reducing property taxes in the case of pensioners, as a means of increasing their discretionary income. The minister replied as follows:

This may be a matter which could be discussed at meetings of ministers of both health and welfare, but it seems to me this is an area which lies exclusively within provincial jurisdiction.

The point I wish to make is this. It is obvious to anyone with eyes in his head that pensioners, especially those in receipt of the guaranteed income supplement, are in desperate need of additional income. In my question I was suggesting to the minister a way of providing some of that needed income to pensioners. I suggested it could be supplied through a remission of property taxes. I find it unacceptable for the minister to hide behind the Constitution as a means of avoiding the provision of such needed aid to pensioners.

• (10:20 p.m.)

It is true beyond any doubt that property taxes are a matter for the provinces under our Constitution. But I suggest that that fact need not inhibit the minister suggesting to the provinces that the reduction or elimination of property taxes to pensioners would have worth-while social effects. I also suggest that he need not restrict himself to purely moral suasion in this regard. He has at his disposal the instrument of the Canada Assistance Plan, which I suggest he could properly employ in this respect. Why not offer under the Canada Assistance Plan to pay half the costs which will be incurred by the provinces in the form of lost revenue through the remission of property taxes to pensioners? I speak not only of property taxes paid directly but also of property taxes paid indirectly as one of the component factors of rental fees that are charged.

Some provinces, through home owner grants, now do this or something similar to it in respect of the entire property tax paying population. In saying that this method is employed by some provinces I do not express my concurrence with it as a form of public policy but simply to indicate that that kind of approach is possible. I am suggesting to the minister that the provinces could decide, if he were to place such a plan under the aegis of the Canada Assistance Plan, whether or not to participate in such a program once it was offered, as they do now in the case of other Canada Assistance Plan programs and as they did in the case of medicare and hospitalization.

I realize that the federal and provincial governments do not have bottomless purses, and thus assistance that could be offered in this manner under the Canada Assistance Plan could be tailored to suit financial circumstances. For example, one approach would be to remit all property taxes to pensioners. Another approach would be to remit the health, welfare and education components of

[Mr. Skoberg.]

property taxes to pensioners. A third approach would be to remit only the education component of property taxes to pensioners. Another would be to remit to all pensioners their taxes, or to restrict the remission to those pensioners in receipt of the guaranteed income supplement. I am trying to demonstrate that this kind of program is infinitely adjustable. Other approaches will probably readily occur to hon. members.

The point that I insist on making is that the federal government could do something in this regard if it wished. The legislative precedents are there, and I suspect that within the Canada Assistance Plan the legislative authority to so act is already extant. Certainly the need is there. Our pensioners must pay far too high a proportion of their income for accommodation. This is true of people living in rental accommodation as well as those owning their own property. I think it is said that people who have worked in order to purchase a home are now finding property taxes so high that they are unable to keep the home. It is a sad fact that governments seem unwilling to act to prevent them from losing their homes. I am simply saying to the minister that he need not feel that his hands are tied by the Constitution if he really wishes to deal with this problem. I have suggested several approaches to him this evening. I hope he will consider them when they are transmitted to him by whichever parliamentary secretary replies on his behalf.

[Translation]

Mr. Albert Béchard (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker, since the fiery and sprightly member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle) is in his riding on official business with his constituents, he asked me to pass on to the hon. member for Selkirk (Mr. Rowland) the answer he would have given him himself.

Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member well knows, the government is always prepared to consider any worth-while and practical system designed to increase the income of needy pensioners, as indeed it did recently by increasing the guaranteed income supplement. As the minister pointed out on November 30th, the hon. member's suggestion falls within a field that comes under provincial jurisdiction.

Whether he likes it or not, there exists in Canada a constitution, and property and property rights come under provincial jurisdiction, as he himself has just recognized.

That, for instance, is why Ontario, facing up to its responsibilities, recently set up a fiscal assistance program to help elderly people; this program applies to all those who, at the end of October 1970, were eligible for the federal guaranteed income supplement. The province has decided to help needy people in future, easing their tax burden, deeming it should start with those whose need is greatest. The authorities therefore decided to include in this class old people receiving a guaranteed income supplement.

These people have been the most affected by the increase in real estate taxes, whether they are owners or tenants, and the Ontario government has judged these