

*Old Age Pensions*

was a proper time to discuss it. O.K.; suppose we agree with him. When it is discussed at that time I do not suppose the minister will be the least bit interested in listening to the discussion.

**Mr. Martin:** I would always be interested in listening to the hon. gentleman.

**Mr. Hansell:** I surely appreciate that, Mr. Speaker. Is he interested in—

**Mr. Blackmore:** In learning.

**Mr. Hansell:**—finding a remedy? Can he find it under the present policy, and is he interested enough to urge the government to change the policy so that a remedy can be found?

**Mr. F. S. Zaplitny (Dauphin):** Mr. Speaker, I will only detain the house for a few minutes. I want to support the plea made by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). It is not the first time, and I am sure it will not be the last, that he has made a plea for the senior citizens of this country. I agree with everything he said and therefore I see no necessity of repeating his arguments. The particular question I should like to bring to the attention of the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Martin) has to do with the administration of the Old Age Security Act rather than with the over-all question of what the amount of the pension should be. From time to time we run across the problem of proof of age, with which I am sure the minister is familiar. I realize that some adjustments have been made in the regulations but we still face the problem, particularly in the case of persons who have come from other countries where quite often the only proof of age they can submit is their immigration record. The information on that record is of course taken from their passports when they enter Canada.

I realize that in these days passports are fairly complete documents containing considerable detail with respect to the person's age and so forth. But in the early days of immigration into this country, in the last part of the nineteenth and the early part of the twentieth centuries, people who came here from European countries had passports that were not particularly complete. I have examined hundreds of them myself and I have yet to see one in which the actual date of birth of the person concerned is stated. In those days only the year of birth was shown. The result is that in such cases, even though the applicant may be able to prove that he or she, as the case may be, was born in a certain year, that of course

does not prove that the applicant reached the age of 70 at such and such a date. That part of the submission must be supported by other means.

As I have stated quite often, these passports are the only existing available documents containing any proof of age. As one who has had a great deal of experience in dealing with these matters in my own part of the country, I would certainly recommend that the department lean over backwards in accepting the stated date of birth provided there is some supporting evidence to substantiate it. If the inflexible attitude is taken by the department that the applicant must prove his exact date of birth and only in the case of inability to do so will it accept the year of birth it means that the pension may not be paid until the end of the particular year in order to make sure that the person has reached the age of seventy. In many cases an injustice is done.

I realize there is some risk in accepting a person's word as to the exact date of birth, particularly if it is unsupported by any evidence, but if it costs the treasury a few thousand dollars a year because of cases where there may be errors, that is a small sum to pay to avoid injustices such as have occurred in the past. I have plenty of evidence of such injustices. I hope the minister will take this matter into consideration. I realize it is one having to do with regulations under the act and does not require legislation by the house, but it is one way in which injustices can be avoided. I merely want to add that I support the contention of my colleagues with respect to the removal of the means test, particularly in the case of blind pensioners.

People who are in that category are perhaps the most unfortunate type of citizens, and I think we should use the greatest possible leniency in respect of persons who are receiving blind pensions. Often it is possible for them to supplement their incomes to some extent by some form of employment. We are told, by those who know better than we do, that nothing could be better for the mental health and well-being of persons of that type than to have some kind of employment to keep them occupied and happy, and to give them a feeling of usefulness in society. It seems to me unfair and unnecessary to penalize such persons because they are able to earn a few dollars in addition to the pensions they receive. I certainly hope that if there is going to be some priority exercised in the removal of the means test from pensioners it should be exercised first of all in respect of the blind pensioners.