

Old Age Security
GOVERNMENT ORDERS

OLD AGE SECURITY

AMENDMENTS RESPECTING AMOUNT OF PENSION, MAXIMUM SUPPLEMENT AND ESCALATION THEREOF

The House resumed, from Friday, December 4, consideration of the motion of Mr. Munro that Bill C-202, to amend the Old Age Security Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Services.

Mr. Thomas S. Barnett (Comox-Alberni): Mr. Speaker, since the era of the Trudeau administration of a Liberal government we have been treated, with some interesting variations, to the old Liberal party technique of handing out crumbs from the rich man's table to the poor. In the days of the Pearson regime, or that of Mr. St. Laurent or Mackenzie King, the crumbs were simply tossed from the table without any great fanfare whenever it appeared that pressures were building up in the country to the point that it seemed necessary to do this in order to retain themselves in power. But under the present order we have had some interesting variations of that practice.

It may perhaps be that there is a mood in this country that will no longer tolerate simply the old hand-out, charity philosophy and therefore the crumbs have to be wrapped in new techniques. I suggest we have been treated to an exhibition of this in the tabling in the House of the white paper. Now, instead of simply tossing the crumbs on the floor they have been nicely gift-wrapped in pretty white paper with a blue cover in order to make them a little more palatable. They have had added to them an interesting new spice called "demogrant". That is the order of things in this debate. We have a fancy, gift-wrapped package called "Income security for Canadians". It of course contains some 60 pages of rather high-sounding phrases, statistical tables and the sort of thing we generally associate with white papers. I should like to make one or two brief references to the words of the white paper as I commence these remarks on second reading of Bill C-202. The white paper begins with these words:

As Canadians strive for a better social and physical environment, one of their goals is to ensure that everyone has an adequate income on which to live.

Following through on that, the white paper suggests that the main thrust of the government's proposed policy for the coming years is the development of a guaranteed income technique as a major anti-poverty policy. Mr. Speaker, having read those high-sounding phrases in the white paper I was quite interested in the speech of the hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton (Mr. McBride) the last time we discussed this measure. I think he took his lead from those opening words. As recorded at page 1772 of Hansard of December 4, the hon. member had this to say with reference to the general terms in which the old age security amendments are before us:

It is my opinion that a guaranteed income in Canada in this technological age that we have entered, and in which we are destined to live for some time, is inevitable. Sooner or later we will have to have a total, integrated plan for a guaranteed income that is applied across the board.

[Mr. Speaker.]

That, I may say, is a good Liberal phrase.

A little later in his speech he said:

I think if we are going to talk about this we have to recognize that our culture, as it is today, still has a kind of hangover or legacy from the day when it was accepted that it was good to work and bad to be unemployed or shiftless and not to work.

He then referred to the thrust of government policy toward a guaranteed annual income as a major technique in overcoming poverty and said:

If we provide a guaranteed income across the board we must again ask how high we are prepared to go? If we put it too high, we are going to be in the position of literally changing our culture. I am not afraid of turning the culture around. It might well be that the time has come, again in a modern age, when we ought to turn the culture around and look at it from the other side.

Having introduced his remarks with this reference to the opening sections of the white paper, and having lauded the idea that we should consider changing our cultural attitudes toward the whole question of work as it relates to income, the hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton turned completely about-face, just as I submit the government has done, and went right back to the old hand-out philosophy. I say this because the white paper, after referring to the main thrust of policy being the guaranteed income technique, goes on to say that from this development will follow a shift in policy of universal payments involving changes in the Old Age Security Act. That, of course, is the subject matter of the bill now before us.

When we look at this bill, we see that it does not come in any fancy gift-wrapping and is not spiced-up in any way. It is just a plain, ordinary bill printed in ordinary black and white type with none of the fancy trimmings of the blue-covered paper which the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) tabled in this House and which the people of Canada have been awaiting with almost bated breath since the beginning of the Trudeau era. The feeling one has all too often in this Parliament is that when we are faced with the reality of having the Liberal party in power, we find ourselves suddenly coming down to earth with a thud and having to face the simple facts of the type of propositions the Liberal party places before us.

• (3:40 p.m.)

The hon. member for Lanark-Renfrew-Carleton said that the principle of this bill is good. Of course, I think one should immediately ask oneself, why does he think it is good? I would again refer to his remarks the other day in regard to the principle of the bill being a good one and would point to the fact that after talking about changes in our cultural attitudes toward work and it being a necessary part of living, he said that the principle of the bill is good because we in society have an obligation to help those who are poor and who cannot help themselves.

I suppose no member of the House would quarrel with the idea that we have a responsibility as individuals and as groups of citizens from time to time to do something to help those who cannot help themselves. We recognize this philosophy with regard to the very young and people