

Old Age Security Act
AFTER RECESS

The House resumed at 8 p.m.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

AMENDMENT TO INCREASE BASIC PENSION AND TO CLARIFY BASE YEAR IN ESCALATION FORMULA

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Lalonde that Bill C-147, to amend the Old Age Security Act, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Health, Welfare and Social Affairs.

Mr. Stanley Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, when I was interrupted for private members' hour at five o'clock I was in the midst of recounting some historical facts in relation to the subject of old age pensions. I do not wish to stay with the pages of history much longer, but there is one other reference I should like to make; it is called for because of the boast that my good friend, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde), made this afternoon. He said, correctly, that the increase now being proposed in terms of dollars is the largest increase ever made in the old age pension at any one time.

Whether one talks of an increase of \$13.39 over what the pension would have been in April, or of \$17.12 over what it now is, one is talking of increases of only 15 per cent or 20 per cent. I pointed out this afternoon that 30 years ago, after a rough session, we won an increase of \$5. Now, Sir, \$5 is a much smaller amount than \$13 or \$17; but I also point out that it was an increase of 25 per cent in the pension of that day, so the minister has a way to go yet. I also point out that \$5 30 years ago had a lot more purchasing power than has \$13.39 today.

This leads me to underscore the point which I make very strongly on behalf of this entire movement, that although there has been an increase—and we welcome that—we are still not satisfied. The basic pension should be \$150 a month. The minister and the government know that we have given them little peace so far this session because this is one of the things we have wanted. I can tell the minister, too, that there will be no peace for the government until the pension has reached the kind of figure that we believe is fair for the older people of this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Alexander: Where is the amendment, Stanley?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hon. members do not seem to realize that private members cannot move money amendments to money bills.

Mr. Alexander: Fake it, anyway.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I hope that remark is on the record. My hon. friend from [The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel).]

Hamilton West (Mr. Alexander) says, "Fake it, anyway". That is the Tory approach to this problem.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): They have completely failed, from their leader down, to indicate what they believe the pension should be.

An hon. Member: Ninety dollars a month.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Yes, or \$95 at best. Mr. Speaker, I say to the Minister of National Health and Welfare that it is a good debating point for him to give us the cost figures of the higher pension we would like to have, but if he is telling us that we cannot today have a higher pension because of the millions or hundreds of millions of dollars it would cost, I hope the minister or the government a few days or a week or two from now will not ask us to vote for hundreds of millions of dollars in tax write-offs to the corporations.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

An hon. Member: Here it comes.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): If the money is available, the people who deserve it, the people to whom it should go, are our senior citizens. We stand by our program of a basic pension of \$150 a month.

I enjoyed the reference that the minister made this afternoon to the question of universality. His predecessors have stood in their places and justified the government's not raising the universal part of the pension but raising, instead, the supplement. Even when he was doing the right thing this afternoon he made the point that it might be better to have added the money to the supplement rather than to the basic amount of the pension. He went into the old argument that when you pay the pension on a universal basis, you are giving some of it to the wealthy, to those who do not need it. Mr. Speaker, it is still our view that in terms of philosophy and in terms of common sense, the best way to unite this country is to get as close to equality as we can; and if we cannot get it in other sections of life, let us get it in the years of retirement.

Let me tell the minister and this House again, that of the Canadian people who are 65 years of age and over there are only about 10 per cent at the top who have so much money that they do not need any more. The other 90 per cent fall into three groups of roughly 30 per cent each. There are the 30 per cent at the bottom who have no income except the pension and therefore qualify for the full guaranteed income supplement on top of their old age security pension; the next 30 per cent have some income, but very little, as a result of which they qualify for part of the guaranteed income supplement. Between these two groups at the bottom which total 60 per cent, and the top wealthy group which makes up 10 per cent, there is another group of 30 per cent consisting of people who have just enough other income to deny them the guaranteed income supplement. As a result, they get none of that money, none of the various benefits and services that are available, free, to pensioners on old age security and the guaranteed income supplement. Yet these people, in a relevant and very real sense, are in need.