

Old Age Security

should like to give special mention to one particular group, the old age pensioners themselves. They have exerted increasing pressure.

The elderly people of this country have a great deal of credit coming for the way in which they have organized, first on a local basis, then provincially, and finally in national combinations of various kinds. They have not only managed to make their own ranks strong; they have gained little by little the support and the respect of other segments of the community. You cannot confer dignity upon anyone. But the elderly people of this country have earned the right to dignity as a result of their own abilities and successes in helping themselves and getting the rest of the community to help them. I believe that fact should be mentioned.

The hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre also dealt with the various increases to the old age pension. He went over each of the increases, and when you consider the different amounts you realize they do not seem to have any practical relevance either to each other or to conditions that existed at the time. They seem to be calculated on the basis of whatever was felt was the least the government could get away with at a given time.

Every little increase in old age pensions over the years has been prised out of reluctant governments of one sort or another in much the same way as the elderly people as pioneers prised out the rocks and the stumps from this country. All their lives they have done their utmost through backbreaking work, with little time or opportunity to provide security for their old age. Now when they get to their elderly years they have to join the ranks of those who have prised, shoved, pushed and pressed reluctant governments to raise little by little the amount they have to live on to the end of their days. We are still at that stage as far as the elderly people are concerned.

The elderly people are not the only ones in that category, but I am dealing with them in particular in view of the legislation now before us. We have had a very difficult and unremitting struggle to get old age pensions to the point they have now reached. Old age pensions have grown in shreds and patches like a crazy quilt, with little bits from here and yonder. Little attention has been given in the past to whether this quilt would cover a person let alone the bed, giving him or her a reasonably comfortable place in which to rest.

● (1600)

We no longer are satisfied with that. Not that some of us have ever been satisfied with it. We believe that up to this point the old age security pension has never been based on what it should have been based; that is, on how much it costs to live at the time the pension is set, how much it costs for food, clothing, shelter, travel and the amenities which go with full living. This is how the old age security pension should be calculated. We say that now is a good time for this government to try to have this principle as the first properly based edifice in its pension structure. Because pensions ought to be calculated on what will provide a decent and full standard of living for the people involved. This minister has shown some vision and some capacity for seeing around the general pension field. How-

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver Kingsway).]

ever, I realize he has backslid a bit; with the crowd around him he is in a backsliding environment.

If this minister has been backsliding somewhat it is because he has had some assistance from pulling hands around him. Yet the minister has shown vision in respect of what can be done in the field of social security legislation. I think probably he is the first minister I have known in his portfolio who has had sense enough to go to the provinces on the matter of family allowances while the amounts and conditions were still fluid. He has asked them what they thought about the tentative study that has been made. He has suggested that they talk about it and see if there can be some agreement. I remember when other ministers went to the provinces with a scheme already established, and with a father-knows-best attitude said, "Take it or leave it". Frequently they left it because it did not suit their particular conditions.

This minister has now brought forward a family allowances scheme which really fits the whole country for the first time in an adequate way. This is a tribute to the minister. I should like to appeal to him now to see if he can do the same thing in trying to be the architect of an old age security scheme that would get away from bits and pieces and shreds and patches. I hope that he will find a way to give all elderly people a fair and just scheme in the light of what it costs to live. I realize that bits and pieces are being put in all the time, but they are still inadequate amounts. The amount of the basic pension is the biggest single difficulty. At the federal convention of our party this summer we came to the conclusion that a basic adequate old age pension, with today's living costs and standards, could not be less than \$200. Last year we advocated \$150, but that was before inflation really went past the moderate stage into the galloping stage. I do not believe an amount of \$200 is too much for today's living conditions.

There is another point. We want also to see put in this new scheme the idea of pensions being made available, not compulsorily, at age 60. If these people were withdrawn from the labour market I think it would give a push to the young people who want a chance to get started in life and have difficulty finding an opportunity. The elderly people dare not let go today, because if they have a job it is their only way of existing until age 65. If it were possible for them to stop work at age 60 and receive their pension this would be very beneficial for those people who have the ailments of heart and body many people have between the ages of 60 and 65. Some of these people are no longer physically or emotionally capable of holding down a job. I think this point should be covered.

Yesterday one of my colleagues in the Social Credit Party again brought up another very important point. I hope the minister will see his way clear to consider these elderly people who are living two to a pension. In a great many cases across this country frequently the husband, because he is a little older, is qualified for the pension while the wife who has never worked outside her home is not. Their family has grown up and there is no other means of living for that couple other than the one pension the husband receives. There is no point in the woman, at that age, going out to look for work because it is non-existent. Even if she did go out to work her elderly husband would be left alone. That woman is doing a tremendous