

Old Age Security Act

The proposed amendments mean that payments to Quebecers will increase by \$67,300,000 in 1972-73. I fail to understand that some people are indignant that the federal government is trying to add \$67,300,000 to the lot of Quebec's senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding my comments, I would like to reply to certain objections raised by some hon. members of the Social Credit Party. They are wondering why the government has not extended the eligibility for the pension concurrently to both husband and wife.

Mr. Speaker, the government has carefully considered the question and found important difficulties, such that if the Social Crediters' proposal was implemented, it would be grossly unfair to widows, single women and unemployed people in the same age bracket. Allowing benefits to the very young wife of a pensioner would untowardly perturb social priorities. In fact, one could expect that women might provide for themselves when their husband's income is insufficient.

On the other hand, paying benefits to the pensioner's wife after 60 would mean discrimination against widows, single women and unemployed men in the same age group.

And, as I said, it would be extremely unfair to apply the proposals of the Social Credit.

The members of the Social Credit party have asked a second question: Why not provide for early and optional retirement at 60?

Such a measure conceivably might encourage the employer to compulsorily retire 60 year old people, even though they might wish to keep on working. Besides, our economy would then be deprived of their productivity, our welfare and health services laden with heavier burdens when they are already hard put to cope with all the problems of those who have prematurely retired.

Mr. Speaker, with the old age security pension set at \$80 and the guaranteed income supplement at \$55, we spend at present some \$2,200 million. An early retirement such as the Cr ditiste party is advocating—supposing everybody was eligible in 1972 and we paid \$200 per person—would mean a considerable increase and we do not feel we can afford the cost of such a system at present.

If, at 60, we granted only a pension based on financial means instead of a universal pension, it would cost at least an extra \$265 million.

Mr. Speaker, I think it is important to observe that the efforts made by the government to help old age pensioners have been constant. All Liberal administrations have granted pension increases. We can thus say that the present government is most concerned with the fate of pensioners and has always wanted to introduce measures which took into account not only the needs of senior citizens but also the resources of taxpayers.

The suggestions made by Cr ditiste members during this debate show how irresponsible they are, and how unrealistic. A payment of \$200 a month for every person aged 60 years and over would cost Canada a minimum of \$5 billion for old age security pension alone, while our present budget is about \$14 billion.

[Mr. Ouellet.]

I would like, therefore, to conclude my remarks by saying that a responsible government should govern taking into consideration the needs of the whole community. This is why I hope that this bill, which is a most adequate and generous measure, will be approved by all parties without hesitation.

[English]

Mr. R. N. Thompson (Red Deer): Mr. Speaker, as I was listening to the remarks of our colleague on the other side of the House justifying this legislation, my memory went back four years to an election campaign that had as its key words "a just society". If there has ever been an injustice perpetrated upon the senior citizens of our country, it was the legislation brought in five years ago which limited the adjustment of the pension paid to our senior citizens to a 2 per cent rise in the cost of living. I do not understand the reasoning behind that kind of legislation. If inflation amounts to 5 per cent a year, why do we penalize our senior citizens? Why do we mock the very purpose of supplying a senior citizens' pension by limiting him to half or less than half of the increase in inflation?

Some hon. Members: hear, hear!

Mr. Thompson: All we are asking at this time is that we make this measure retroactive to January 1, 1967, when the guaranteed income supplement was introduced, and adjust the guaranteed income supplement to make it equal to the actual cost of living increase. We are not asking for anything more than that. That would be justice, Mr. Speaker.

The implementation of the correction of faults in our society to render justice should begin at this level of responsibility which affects the very lives of the people who have given their all to help make Canada what it is today. What this legislation should have done in the first instance was to make what is owing to our pensioners as a result of the increased cost of living retroactive, over and above the \$80 basic pension and over and above the guaranteed income supplement, so that the pension would be equal to the actual cost of living. I think it is a disgrace.

• (1530)

I think that, regardless of how the Liberal government attempts to justify its position we have to wait until another election campaign to try to give these pensioners part of what we owe them. It is the old story of playing politics with our senior citizens, and then only to give them half of what they deserve, by making it retroactive only to the beginning of this year. That is simple justice. The government would have faced its responsibility by raising the basic pension to \$100 a month and the guaranteed income supplement \$15 a month, only if they intended to compensate for the cost of living rise during the last five months. Again, I do not understand why the government has not been able to see this.

There is another glaring injustice. It relates to the spouses of pensioners who have reached 65, and who have themselves not yet reached the age of 65 but who have passed their 60th birthdays. This suggestion relates very specifically to the needs of many widows across the country. However, it applies to all those whose husbands or wives have reached the age of 65 and find it difficult to