

Old Age Security Act

So having talked about programs designed to relieve our senior citizens of expenses, as well as the income support measures, I would now like to move quickly into the area of services for our senior citizens. As I have already mentioned, we have provided an income floor for our senior citizens and we have relieved them of major areas of expense. But to provide financial support and relief in the area of financial expense is really not enough. These actions are essentially passive. They provide the senior citizens the financial ability to live a life approaching comfort. But positive action is also highly desirable in programs which allow our senior citizens to participate in activities which add social and emotional richness to their lives. Just for this reason the Canada Assistance Plan provides cost-sharing services which permit this rounding-out, including such things as home visiting programs and some recreational programs. Again, I think hon. members should be justifiably proud of these provisions.

However, this still leaves one other important area of human activity. I refer to the area of challenge. Simply because a person has advanced to a certain age level does not mean he has ceased to be able to make a meaningful contribution to our society. There are many talents and skills among Canadians 65 years of age and over which ought to be tapped both to enhance a sense of continued meaning in their lives and also to benefit those who can make great use of the skills of our senior citizens.

One prototype program in this regard is now operating under the aegis of the Department of External Affairs. I refer to Canadian Executive Service Overseas, a program which seeks to make available to developing countries the knowledge and talents of experienced executives and managers, people imbued with the wisdom that has come from many years of experience. Programs such as these give the cue to moving ever more strongly in this area, and this is indeed our intention. I will have more to say about it at a later date, but I think that the New Horizons for the Aged program which the Minister of Finance announced in his Monday night budget will provide even more opportunities for those 65 years of age and over to stay right in the mainstream of Canadian society, rather than being forcibly turned out to pasture and confined to an inactive existence.

So in review I would indicate that we have now moved up, since 1966, from a guaranteed income supplement which provided \$155 a month to an income supplement which guarantees a single person \$150 a month.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): That first figure should be \$105.

Mr. Munro: That, of course, is even better. As the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) states, the former amount should be \$105.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): The minister said \$155 when he meant \$105. He should follow his notes.

Mr. Munro: We now have the level of \$150 a month for a single person and \$285 a month for a married couple. Added to this we have had significant tax relief through improvement of exemptions. And under the Canada Assistance Plan, services such as institutional care and drugs can be provided our senior citizens.

[Mr. Munro.]

Mr. Rynard: Oh, oh!

Mr. Munro: Yes, indeed, they can. Since there is significant income support under the present legislation to \$150 a month for a single person and \$285 a month for a married couple, perhaps the provinces no longer will find it necessary to give additional income support as some of them, though not all, have been doing. Perhaps this will enable them to take greater advantage of the cost-sharing arrangements under the Canada Assistance Plan to provide these very necessary services for our senior citizens.

Couple all this with a stepped-up housing program and the proposed New Horizons program to encourage participation of our senior citizens in useful and meaningful endeavour, to help end the isolation from which so many of them suffer, and I think the government in advancing this legislation today can take justifiable pride in the provision of income support services and protection against crippling expenses which is unequalled in any other country in the western world.

• (1700)

Mr. Jack Marshall (Humber-St. George's-St. Barbe): Mr. Speaker, in the interest of the rapid passage of the bill on second reading I will not be too long. I would just like to mention my amazement at the fact that two or three days after the budget speech the government can suddenly come up with amendments to this bill. All we have to do is look back at the Family Income Security Plan in Bill C-170 which has dragged for almost two years, and we have not yet obtained benefits for the children of this country, benefits which are so badly needed by the low-income families.

The minister spoke about the great things the government is going to do. We agree that this bill is a good one, but less than seven weeks ago, on March 23, 1972, the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) rejected the Progressive Conservative appeal to the government which read as follows:

—to contribute to pensions, allowances and other benefits granted or administered by the government a yearly percentage increase corresponding to the percentage increase in the consumer price index for Canada.

The minister that night voted against the motion which read exactly as I have quoted it. Today, we in the House of Commons are in the incongruous position of having the same motion put before us in the form of a bill introduced by none other than the minister himself. What miracle wrought this conversion from a steadfast no on March 23 to a definite yes on May 8? The minister had some interesting things to say on March 23, 1972. He dismissed absolutely our requests for fairness to Canada's 1,800,000 recipients of the universal old age pension and our pleas that he raise pensions to a decent level and peg them to rises in the cost of living. He said, and I quote from page 1103 of *Hansard*:

As a government, we have obviously decided that in terms of bringing money to those who need it in waging a successful campaign against poverty, we must change from making universal payments to everyone, irrespective of income, to a selective technique. We must have an income test—I call it a guaranteed income technique—applied to what was previously our universal demogrant program of old age security—