

Old Age Security Act

Mr. Speaker, we fought hard over this issue then as we have done over the years since I first came here. Likewise, I may say that back in 1942 and 1943 public opinion was on our side. In addition to that, some of the provinces felt that something had to be done. In those days the pension was not only as I have described it but it was financed 75 per cent by the federal government and 25 per cent by the provinces.

In my own province of Manitoba, where the Honourable Stuart Garson was then premier, an effort was made to force the hand of the government by adding \$1.25 to the \$20 pension and saying that this was 25 per cent of a \$5 increase but the federal government still refused to agree. Some other provinces took similar steps with the result that finally there was enough pressure from the provinces and the public, and enough pressure put on the government by those of us who were in this House, that we did win an increase.

Hon. members who have been around here for even a few years will be interested in knowing the vehicle that was used in this instance. It was announced on July 24, 1943, by the then minister of finance, the late Right Hon. J. L. Ilsley. He pointed out that the government of the day, that of Mackenzie King, had decided that, for the sake of public morale in time of war it was necessary to do something to ease the plight of our old age pensioners; as a result, it was under the War Measures Act that an order in council was passed raising the maximum pension from \$20 to \$25 a month. I smiled to myself when I looked last evening at *Hansard* for July 24, 1943, and discovered that the then member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) spoke on behalf of this party in response to that increase from \$20 to \$25 per month. And what did the member for Winnipeg North Centre say on that occasion? He said, "We welcome the increase; we welcome this \$5, but it should have been \$10."

• (1650)

An hon. Member: That sounds just like the hon. member.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Thirty years have gone by, Mr. Speaker, and the same member for Winnipeg North Centre is now saying the same thing. We welcome the increase to \$100, but, for heaven's sake, why did the government not make it \$150?

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Let there be no doubt about it; that is still our position—

An hon. Member: But the hon. member voted for this increase.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre):—that the basic old age pension should be raised to \$150 a month.

Let me say that I like my friend the hon. member for Hillsborough (Mr. Macquarrie) so well that I hoped he would, in his speech, fill a gap this afternoon that has been evident for a long time. I dared to hope that he would tell us where his party stands on what the basic amount of the old age security pension should be. The Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Stanfield) has not told us.

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

When asked about this during the course of the budget debate, he told my leader to look up what he had said during the last budget debate. We did. His proposals added up to almost \$95 a month. The hon. member for Hillsborough today said that the basic pension of \$100 per month is about \$7 short of the amount it ought to be, yet he did not say that the basic pension ought to be even \$107 per month.

Some hon. Members: Shame.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): If one remembers, when considering the remarks of the hon. member, that during the election campaign the Leader of the Opposition was honest and forthright enough to tell old age pensioners that he would not back their campaign for \$150 a month as the basic pension, it becomes clear, though we may be dissatisfied and disappointed because the basic pension has been increased only to \$100, that this pension increase is better than any which would have been granted if the roles of the government and opposition had been reversed and the opposition were sitting on the other side of the House of Commons.

Mr. Alexander: The hon. member is only speculating. He will never know.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, I was immodest enough a few minutes ago to draw a parallel in history between something I had been doing and saying in 1943 and that which I am doing and saying in 1973. May I draw another historical parallel? Near me sits the hon. member for Vancouver-Kingsway (Mrs. MacInnis). Back in 1926, it was her late and illustrious father, the former member for Winnipeg North Centre, the late J. S. Woodsworth, who, assisted by a few others—

An hon. Member: Were you here then Stan?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): No, Mr. Speaker, but I was watching what was going on—who got from the Mackenzie King government of the day the first old age pension in this country. It is clear from the record and from the letter Mr. King sent Mr. Woodsworth, copies of which we have scattered widely, that the government of that day initially had no intention of bringing in an old age pension but that, because of the pressure which Mr. Woodsworth was able to put on the minority government of that day, we were given the first old age pension in this country.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): I say to you that today, Mr. Speaker, that page of history is being repeated. Today, again, there is a minority government in this House. The hon. member for Hillsborough wondered what the Liberals might have done if we were not in the position of exerting some of the influence we seem to have today. I can tell him what would have happened if the Liberals had been returned with a clear majority.

An hon. Member: Or the Tories.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Or if the Conservatives had been so returned, for that matter.