

Old Age Security Act

March. If the bill does not pass they will get the sum of \$112 or \$113, or an amount like that, by virtue of the legislation as it now stands. But, Mr. Speaker, the 800,000 Canadians who receive only the basic old age security pension—which they get as part of the contract, because it is their right to receive it—will receive only \$80 a month in January, if this bill passes this month. That is an increase of 42 cents from this year's \$79.58. If this bill does not pass, they will get \$81.17. You know, that poses a challenge to Parliament does it not?

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that in the light of all the facts, members on both sides of the House will give this bill very serious consideration. It deals with a terribly important issue. It deals with a matter which, in 1951, we resolved in what I think was the finest way it could be resolved, when we said old age pensions should be paid to all as a matter of right. I hope that we come back to justice, fair play and a decent concept of social security for all Canadians.

• (5:00 p.m.)

[Translation]

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, I intend to be brief in my remarks on Bill C-202.

Since I came to this House, there has often been talk of increasing the old age pension, but not much has been achieved in that regard.

Even though this bill provides for nothing more than a 42 cent monthly increase in the pension of those whose income does not exceed a certain level fixed by the act, we still intend to support it in order that a higher pension might be paid to our old people as soon as possible.

But we should ask ourselves whether our senior citizens are not entitled to better consideration. In Canada, in 1970, do these people not have a right to more gratitude for the efforts they made building the country, for their discoveries and the progress we owe them? Unfortunately, more than 500,000 of those who could continue the work started by Canadians aged 65 or over, are unemployed.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that nobody would be any poorer if Canada decided to give old people a minimum income which would allow them to meet all their needs without having to worry about tomorrow.

I know a great number of people who live in very strained circumstances. We must admit that with \$3,060 two persons cannot easily procure shelter, pay school and municipal taxes, buy clothes and live decently. This is surely not an amount commensurate with our ability to pay.

When Jacques Cartier discovered Canada and when the first settlers in his party had to pick wild berries, fish and hunt to provide for their needs, old people could not rely very much on the assistance of the state in difficult times.

However, in 1970, conditions have changed and we should show more gratitude to those who are really quite

[Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre).]

deserving. Canada can do more. Those people are not asking for charity, but justice. We must distribute the wealth of our country instead of hoarding it or paying grants to curtail production. We should pass some measures which would enable the aged to enjoy a well earned security. I understand what the government means. I am sure that the present government, as well as the preceding ones, has meant to show gratitude to the older people by drafting legislation which would allow the payment of pensions. I remember—and yet, I am not very old—that a number of years ago, when one mentioned this possibility of paying pensions or family allowances, one was called a communist. These measures did not make sense. They could not see why one should give money for nothing, to people who had not been required to work to deserve it.

Times have changed. Nowadays, everyone agrees that this is not a communist deal, but a matter of social justice, of economic possibilities. Everybody wants the government to keep on paying these pensions and to increase them without of course being brought to the brink of bankruptcy.

We have production surpluses of all sorts. Machinery is lying idle in our factories and getting rusty. Workers have nothing to do. Last night, four young men from my riding told me that they had been fired. They asked me if I could do something for them. I answered that I was willing to help them—I do this every day—but the system is faulty, we are not proceeding in the right direction.

Instead of putting our economic car on the right road so as to enable the young to work, we are driving a car with half its wheels off the road.

Young people are ready to help raise the old age security pensions but on condition that they should be able, in turn, to earn money.

Fortunately, some provincial governments have taken the lead and proved that it was possible to pay more than a small pension which allows only for living from day to day with no security at all.

The provinces of Alberta and British Columbia have seen to it that old people get an income of \$139 and \$149 respectively.

These provinces are none the worse for it. As a matter of fact, their production potential is sufficient to meet the demand of aged people who have a higher income.

An aged person who receives a pension, say \$130 a month, could not live decently when rents are \$180 or even \$200 a month. You might say the difference will be put up by the provincial government under the social welfare plan. However, it happens that these persons may feel ill at ease, they may consider themselves as public charity cases and be dissatisfied with their lot.

Mr. Speaker, our economic system offers major opportunities of all kinds in the construction industry, the manufacture of clothing, of foodstuffs. However, the system is being paralyzed and an effort is being made to deprive some people of such advantages.