

Old Age Security Act Amendment

this question will finally be settled, and that is by public opinion itself.

I feel that the people of this country, regardless of age, would agree that it is time we were prepared to approve an old age pension in the order of \$100 or \$105 a month which, taken with benefits under the Canada Pension Plan, would constitute a package large enough to allow our elderly people to live in real comfort at the standard we would wish them to enjoy.

Mr. G. H. Aiken (Parry Sound-Muskoka): It is becoming more and more apparent as time passes and the debate proceeds that the government has made a fundamental and terrible error in its approach to matters affecting the welfare of the senior citizens of Canada.

With due deference to the minister, who was not then the minister concerned, I would remind the house of what happened at the time the Canada Pension Plan was under consideration. At that time, a simple amendment was moved asking that the Canada Pension Plan be wiped out and that old age security payments be increased. It is now becoming obvious that this is what should have been done. I intend to show, if I may, that all the developments since that time have resulted in a welfare jungle as far as the old people of Canada are concerned.

As was pointed out, the Canada Pension Plan will fill a need for some people at some time in the future. The government agreed that this was true, but promised that something else would be done for the old people to fill the gaps which existed in the arrangements. So they brought in the Canada Assistance Plan to fill some of the holes left by the Canada Pension Plan. This was supposed to be all-embracing in its benefits to the old people. The Canada Assistance Plan has been enacted. It has not proved very successful. Even if it had, a tremendous number of gaps would still be left.

What happened? The government now brings down amendments to the Old Age Security Act in order to plug a few more holes. The intention is to help those people who got nothing out of the Canada Pension Plan, who were not assisted by the Canada Assistance Plan and who got little out of the old age security legislation. So, an attempt is made to give them additional income by means of old age security payments after a means test. It is unlikely that this latest effort will prove effective. For one thing, it will only be in force for a limited time. Then again,

[Mr. Schreyer.]

many people who are on the borderline, as it were, are bound to be excluded. They will not be eligible for benefits.

An effort has been made to block the holes, but the sieve is still there. There are still many people who are not covered by the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Assistance Plan or these old age security provisions. If the government could turn the clock back and adopt the proposal to make a simple increase in old age security payments, I am sure it would do so. But now there is no way out for hon. gentlemen opposite except to continue to add to this patchwork, hoping that in time everybody will derive some benefit where the need exists.

● (6:30 p.m.)

I say this is a wrong approach. It is embarrassing to the people who have to make the applications. It is not the approach originally taken with respect to the universal old age pension.

I would just like to mention a few of the things which come to the attention of a member of parliament in this welfare jungle which we now have, and I am extremely sorry that we are going to have another set of qualifications with respect to pensions. There will be another set of forms, and another set of criteria. But right now, when a member of parliament gets an application for a pension from one of his constituents, he needs a check list to try to figure out what assistance his constituent can receive.

Someone will write and say, "I am in difficulty; I need a pension". Then, his member has to write and ask, "How old are you? If you are 69 or over, you should be getting old age security". If the person writes back and says he is under that age, then the member may reply, "If you are over 65 maybe you are entitled to some assistance under the old age assistance plan or the Canada Assistance Plan".

Failing that, the member asks, "Are you a single woman, or a widow over 60? At least in Ontario you may be entitled to the widows' allowance". But if that is not the case, then the member will ask, "Are you a mother with children, whose husband cannot work or who has left you? If that is the case, you may be entitled to mothers' allowance. If your husband has left you, have you tried to locate him?"

But that may not be the situation. The applicant may ask, "What about the Canada Pension Plan?" At present the government is