

*Old Age Security Act*

Statistics Canada recently published a very significant table in this regard.

If the price index is considered on a basis of 100, we see that in 1947, we could buy with 65.6 cents what costs \$1.33.4 today.

Mr. Speaker, this means that every time the cost of living rises, the purchasing power is reduced, especially for older people and all those who cannot earn their living. They are pitied but are only given meagre pensions or welfare allowances.

This is why the Social Credit party has been urging for a long time that older people's rights be recognized. We must not grant them pensions as we give charity. No. They have rights, and it is these rights that we want the government to recognize.

In 1965, the committee for the advancement of older citizens gave evidence before a special joint committee of the House of Commons and the Senate on the new Canada Pension Plan. Here is what was said at that time:

We are taking the liberty of saying openly that we do not want an increase in the cost of living, we want a decrease. The increase in prices is a direct cut in benefits, thus reducing all income and mostly the income of those who live on small private pensions. A cost of living adjustment of \$2 cannot compensate the increase in prices.

Further on, it says:

We urge that adequate provisions and arrangements be included in the new legislation to ensure that all pension plans provide a minimum basic pension of \$100 a month. We also request that the age limit for both plans be brought down to age 60 for women and age 65 for men, when full benefits should be paid.

Not just a portion of the allowance, according to the wealth of individuals or the savings they may have achieved! I shall discuss that point later on in my speech.

I continue to quote:

Old-age pensions were introduced in Canada under economic conditions very different from those now prevailing. In those days, old-age pensions were hand-outs, bare pittance subject to means tests, to keep body and soul together at age 70. When the fire of life was barely a spark, and life expectancy was much shorter than today.

Mr. Speaker, this is no longer a question of charity to older people. It is a matter of right which we seem to forget. Instead of thinking about things and goods that Canada has to offer to older people, we think in terms of dollars. As the government is "broke" it does not show much generosity to older people.

I quote from the White Paper on Income Security in Canada tabled a few months ago by the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro). It says on page 1, first column:

This occasion, when new income security policies are being considered, affords an opportunity for a statement of purpose and basic policy. Although any new initiatives are necessarily limited by what is economically feasible—

Can we see the existing needs? The government's new initiatives are being paralyzed by the economic situation. We are thinking in terms of dollars. There is no consideration as to what may be offered and as to what the country is in a position to offer, be it for food, housing, clothing, any kind of services. We think of the expenses that the country can afford.

[Mr. Laprise.]

And in the center column, we find this—I think it is precious, Mr. Speaker—and I quote:

Unless the system gives most individuals capable of working the opportunity to productively exercise their initiative, the national wealth to finance income security will not be generated, and the country will lack the means to assist those who cannot participate fully or partially in the labour force.

Why the "unless"? Do Canadians refuse this productive exercise, Mr. Speaker? Is there something wrong with the system in the eyes of those who wrote the white paper? They seem to have doubts about the system.

Mr. Speaker, if there is something wrong with the system, let us change it and let us allow the elderly to receive what they are expecting.

In 1967, I submitted to the House a motion which provided that both spouses would simultaneously receive their old age pension.

• (1820)

On May 7th 1971, I again insisted that when someone receives his old age security pension, even if his spouse has not reached pension age, the latter has a right to take advantage of this pension as well as the former. In my opinion, if two persons live on such a pension, even if it is now being increased to \$150, it is still not enough.

Then, if the spouse were also to receive the old age security pension, we would allow at least the couple to live decently upon retirement.

When I put forward this motion on May 7th, 1971, the hon. member for Hull (Mr. Isabelle) who was then Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Health and Welfare said about me:

—aroused my curiosity to the point where I wondered whether the speech he delivered so masterly

"would not fall in the darkness and void of times".

The member for Hull should have said instead that the speech made by the hon. member for Abitibi "would not fall in the darkness and void of the liberal party". That would have been far more accurate, for we are still at the same point as we were then, and the liberal party overlooks the spouses of persons 65 years old.

With the low increase it now grants to our senior citizens, which in fact does not exceed \$12.30 a month, the government thinks it can call an election next week and go to the people hoping that the old people will crawl before it, before the liberal party, and carry it back to power.

Mr. Speaker, I think and I hope that the government is wrong. In view of the way the government keeps on insisting on that increase in income, and the participation of the guaranteed minimum income, we, of the social credit party, request that the pension be universal irrespective of whatever other income our senior citizens might have.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I should like to submit two cases out of the hundreds I have dealt with during the past few years. Let us take the case of a man from La Sarre, my own city, a close neighbour of mine. He has reached retirement age. Having worked hard from age 12 or 13, he saved, managed carefully all his life. He and his wife were never seen in taverns or theaters. They deprived themselves of amenities all their lives and thus managed to put