

Old Age Security Act

he had spoken so bravely on January 12 about what his party wanted in the way of an increase. It was to be substantial, Mr. Speaker. If one were a new student of English and reading the speech delivered by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre on January 12, one could be forgiven for assuming that substantial and increase together form one word, because the hon. member never used one without the other. I ask the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre if a \$13.39 increase is his understanding of a substantial increase?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): No.

Mr. McKinnon: The difference between \$82.88 and \$150 is quite large; I regret the small size of the increase as much as the hon. member does. I regret that the hon. member was unable to have his way in this matter.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Hear, hear!

Mr. McKinnon: I understand the position the hon. member is in. He is in much the same position as I am. I do not think the increase is worth very much, either, but it is better than none, I suppose. This leads one to this conjecture; how small would the increase need to have been before the hon. member and his party would have considered it an insult and refused to support it?

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Mr. Speaker, \$97.88 would have been the figure.

Mr. McKinnon: Mr. Speaker, the difference between \$97.88 and \$100 is \$2.12. The hon. member is drawing a very fine line. It would appear that the party on my left really did not require any particular amount and that their attitude to the government was, "If you want us, just whistle."

Before the budget was brought down we wondered how much the increase in the old age pension would be. I guessed that it would be increased to \$120 because I did not think the government could count on NDP support for any length of time if the pension went much below \$120. On days when I was feeling good I thought it might increase to \$130, and on days when I did not feel so good I thought the increase might be down to \$115. Never in my wildest predictions did I think the pension would be so low, as a couple of distinguished members of the party to my left had demanded a substantial increase in the basic pension. I did not think, in view of the position of power which that party now occupies, that it would buy the increase to \$100. When the government introduced the figure of \$100, I turned to my seatmate that night and said, "The NDP will never support this." I am afraid I either overestimated the principles of the NDP or underestimated their fear of an election.

Why was the pension plus guaranteed income supplement increased to \$170? That is a rather strange figure, although there is some rationale for it. If you have less than \$170 a month, you are liable to starve to death or die of neglect. That amount, I suppose, will just enable one to buy shelter and food, and nothing else. That is why the figure of \$170 was chosen. So, in considering \$170, which is made up of the basic old age pension plus the supplement, we are considering an amount that will just enable

[Mr. McKinnon.]

one to exist. It represents the barest minimum of existence. Everyone knows that you cannot live on \$82.88 or \$100. Therefore, the present old age pension is only a partial payment to enable old age pensioners to live at the barest subsistence level.

I am in favour of the universal approach, as is the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre, probably for reasons he did not mention yesterday. Under this kind of legislation, when it is so easy to apply, there is a great temptation on the part of some people to cheat a little bit. Can you blame them? They have been so grievously wronged that one can hardly blame them for cheating a little bit when the occasion arises. Some civil servant puts a piece of paper before them and says, "All you have to do is sign this piece of paper and you will get the supplementary payment. If you sign it, you will get; if you do not sign it, you will not." Many of our old people, when they realize how much they have contributed to our society and how little they are now getting from it, will be tempted to sign and so obtain the supplement. They know what they are doing, but one can hardly blame them when it is made so easy to cheat.

There are other ways of cheating, other ways of getting around the regulations. If you own property, you can turn it over to your children before you reach 65 years of age. I suppose another way of getting around the asset problem is to keep your money in a sock in the garden. They are only allowed to have so much.

• (1450)

When drafting legislation of this nature, we should consider the people who have to deal with it. I draw this to the attention of the minister responsible for the Unemployment Insurance Act. If something could be done to simplify that complex legislation, it would be a great boon to society and the administration of government. The Unemployment Insurance Act is very complex. Some of the people who draw unemployment insurance may understand it, but those administering it at the lower level certainly do not.

I wish to correct the statement made this morning by the hon. member for Thunder Bay (Mr. Penner) while trying to tell us how pure and virtuous the Liberals are. He stated that the British Columbia government added \$30 to the pension to increase it to \$200. Any sense of fairness and equity should impel an hon. member to state that the British Columbia government added not \$30, but \$50. The federal government is now catching up a little by increasing the old age pension and guaranteed income supplement to \$170. It was \$150 when the NDP government in that province, headed by Mr. Barrett, brought out the \$200 a month income.

So that it will not appear I am turning toward the NDP, I must state that my understanding now is that this federal basic pension increase will not be passed on to some of the pensioners in British Columbia. Those receiving the guaranteed income supplement will not be getting \$230 a month. They will still receive \$200. The federal government monies will simply go into the general revenue to help British Columbia pay for the increase. I am not critical of this attitude of the British Columbia government, in view of the difficulty they have had getting the