

rising living standards, and also to provide for the elimination of any means or income test from the Old Age Security Act, so that the full pension thereunder will be recognized as the established right of all our people.

● (1600)

He said: Madam Speaker, this is an interesting coincidence, but there are those in the House who know I did not plan it this way. It was the officials in one of the offices that lined up this motion for debate this afternoon at four o'clock, and it was the government that lined up the bill to raise judges' salaries for earlier this afternoon. I hope the readiness that most of the members have shown to support substantial increases in the salaries of judges will reflect itself now in a readiness to support the proposal for a substantial increase in the pensions paid to our senior citizens.

Mr. Whittaker: They are going to accept it.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): My hon. friend to my right says they are going to accept this motion. I would not be surprised if there are a number of speeches in favour of the general principle for which I am asking, but at five o'clock they will still be talking about it.

It is still my view that one of the finest moves ever made by the parliament of Canada was when the Old Age Security Act was passed and came into effect on January 1, 1952. The passing of that legislation changed the situation we had for a number of years in which older people got a pension only if they could meet a very severe means test, and in its place it was determined that everyone who met the requirement of residence and age, at that point it was age 70, would draw a pension as of right.

Let me say also that I think one of the finest acts ever performed by my late friend, the Right Hon. Louis St. Laurent, was when he announced after the passing of that act that he was going to apply for his pension. He was the Prime Minister of Canada, he had a private income, but he was of pensionable age and he said to the people of Canada that he wanted to demonstrate that this was something that should go to all people who were of pensionable age and there was to be no stigma attached to it on the part of anyone. He said that was the reason he was applying for old age security.

Not only do I see this in terms of having lived through it all, but I feel we have changed the character of retirement living by the extent to which we have made other things which are available to older people a matter of right. We have come a long way in many respects since the Old Age Security Act came into being. That in itself was tremendous progress from what was done back in the mid 1920's. We have now added, even where they are not provided for everybody, hospitalization, medicare, prescription drugs, and free or low-cost travel on public transportation and so on, including half rates to movie theatres and the various other benefits which accrue to a person now simply because he is 65, without any questions being asked.

My concern is that these social advances which were made with the adoption of the Old Age Security Act should be continued, and we should improve the whole picture by substantially raising the amount of the old age security pension, by getting rid of the means or income

Old Age Security

test that applies to that portion known as the guaranteed income supplement, and by bringing these things into effect at age 60 instead of age 65.

The motion as you read it from the chair, Madam Speaker, proposes that the basic pension under the Old Age Security Act be raised to \$200 a month. I draw your attention to the fact that the motion was filed on October 10, 1974. A lot has happened since then. I believe it was two weeks ago today that, under Standing Order 43, I tried to move a motion to raise the basic old age pension to \$300 a month. If it were possible to amend this motion now before us I would amend it along those lines, because in the past few months since this motion was placed on the order paper we have spread money around lavishly and easily for certain other persons. It is also the fact, of course, that the rise in the cost of living has escalated old age security pensions and the guaranteed income supplement to the point that an individual who is drawing the full amount is now getting more than \$200 a month, but it is still only \$123.42 for the person who draws only old age security.

The time has come to raise that amount to a figure like \$250 or \$300 a month, and to see to it that it goes to everyone as a matter of right. A few moments ago one of the defences made in regard to higher salaries for judges, members of parliament and others was that they would pay a good chunk of it back to the Department of National Revenue in income tax. If that argument is good for judges and members of parliament, I submit it is also good for those who are in receipt of old age security.

What has always been the basic theory behind the universal program is that the most fair, the most dignified, and the most humane way of providing social benefits is to give them on a universal basis and let the income tax take care of those who, because of their other income, really do not need it. I know the same Liberal party which took nearly half a century to get to the point of being willing to go for universal old age security has now backed away from it and is preaching the gospel of selectivity. Like Arthur Meighen, and I had better bring a Conservative into the picture since I mentioned Mr. St. Laurent, I am unrevised and unrepentant about this. I still think the best way to provide benefits like old age security is to provide them on a universal basis without applying a means or income test beforehand, letting the income tax apply afterwards.

That is the reason why I argue that the basic pension should now be raised, as the motion says, to \$200 or, as my motion of two weeks ago suggested, to \$300, and that the guaranteed income supplement portion be paid to everyone, that there be no means or income test on it and that we get back to what we started out to do in the early 1950's, namely, bring to our older people the full measure of dignity that is their right.

I get teased around here sometimes for having been here for quite a while. I do not mind that teasing; I am proud of the fact that I have been here quite a few years. One of the things that is very prominent in my memory is the realization of the difference we have made in the lives of the older people. Some 30, 40 or 50 years ago they were kept in back rooms. They could not go anywhere as they did not have the clothes or the car fare. Now older people get out