

Columbia did when they were elected a few months ago was to increase the old age supplement to \$200, but they did not increase the basic pension by even a five-cent piece? Surely I have said enough already to show how much I appreciate the hon. member and what he has tried to do. It is all very well to say that the great NDP want universality across the board, but when a provincial NDP government comes to power they increase the supplement to \$200 a month, with the help of the Canada Assistance Plan, but they do not raise the basic pension by even a dime. So I respectfully point out that it is one thing to be in opposition but it is a completely different thing when you are sitting on the government side of the House.

It is now 21 years since universal old age pensions were first introduced in Canada for those aged 70 and over. In 1952, this parliament provided a universal benefit of \$40 a month to every person in Canada over 70 who met the residence requirements. In 1967, parliament provided a guaranteed income supplement to that pension of \$30 a month on the basis of an income test for old age security pensioners. Commencing in 1966, the age of eligibility for pensions was reduced from 70 one year at a time until in 1970 the age of eligibility reached 65.

Before 1952, a very high proportion of Canadians in retirement were obliged to seek social assistance to keep body and soul together. In the intervening years, the level of income guarantee provided to our senior citizens has increased steadily until, as provided for in the legislation now before the House, single pensioners will be entitled to \$170 a month, couples to \$325 a month, and the basic pension is increased to \$100 from \$82.88.

I would remind hon. members, in passing, that this afternoon the hon. member for Hillsborough, speaking on behalf of the Conservative party, said that \$100 was not enough and that to keep up with the cost of living it should be raised to \$107 a month. I simply cannot understand how a party as great as the Conservative party was in former years can be talking about such a delicate subject as old age pensions, because there is not one person in the House of Commons tonight, in fact there are very few people in the whole of Canada, at the age of retirement who cannot remember what our Tory friends did when they ruled the roost with one of the greatest majorities in the history of Canada. I will tell you what they did. They raised the old age pension to \$65 a month to be given to pensioners at age 70 and they said to them, "God bless you. Go ahead; this is the best we can do".

An hon. Member: That is a lot better than you did.

An hon. Member: How about \$2.88?

Mr. Alexander: How about 42 cents?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order, please. Perhaps it is because hon. members are approaching the time when they will receive the old age pension and enthusiasm is getting to them, but it is difficult for the Chair to follow what the hon. member is saying.

Mr. Alexander: He is not making any sense, anyway.

Mr. Whicher: Let me remind you that at the age of 70—

Old Age Security Act

[Translation]

Mr. Laprise: Mr. Speaker, on the point of order that you just made, I must say I would have been happy a short time ago when my colleague for Compton (Mr. Latulippe) was speaking if the one who was in the Chair at the time had made the same comment when a number of Liberal members on my left were really kicking up a row.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Boulanger): Order. That is not a point of order.

[English]

Mr. Whicher: It is better than the \$65 a month at age 70 that our friends to the left of Mr. Speaker gave the senior citizens of Canada, with no guaranteed income supplement whatsoever. Yet they tell us now, through their main speaker, that instead of \$100 a month it should be \$107. Not once in this speech did the hon. member mention that senior citizens at the age of 65, those who have no other income, will be drawing \$325 a month for a couple while a single person at the age of 65 will be drawing \$170 a month. Having heard the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre this afternoon casting aspersions on the sincerity of the Conservative party with regard to senior citizens, I say that if I am ever unfortunate enough to need a heart transplant, let me have the heart of a Tory, because so far as senior citizens are concerned it has never been used.

Some hon. Members: Oh, oh!

• (2110)

Some hon. Members: Hear, Hear!

Mr. Nielsen: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a question of privilege. I assure the hon. member that all Tories have hearts, but that is not the part of my anatomy that I would give him.

Mr. Alexander: What's your next statement, Ross?

Mr. Whicher: My next statement is that I meant every single word of my last statement. Although there are no precise data on the proportion of pensioners who still have to submit to a needs test to receive social assistance before this legislation takes effect, it appears to be in the order of from 5 per cent to 10 per cent, depending on what region of Canada one is talking about. Except for a small number of people with special needs, this legislation will provide to our senior citizens a level of income sufficient to remove them from the welfare rolls once and for all.

Special needs might include drugs, nursing home care, and home care, and of course I would be less than frank if I did not remind hon. member that the provinces, which have responsibility in this field, receive 50 per cent of the cost of this assistance under a federal cost-sharing program. Hon. members should note the federal cost-sharing of increased supplements for the aged and the handicapped in British Columbia. This could well apply to other provinces. For example, it could happen in the provinces of Ontario and Prince Edward Island. If Conservative members really want to put pressure on the provinces and if they are really sincere in support of the speech given on their behalf this afternoon, they should