

The Address—Mr. Johnston

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but I must inform him he has exhausted his time, and can only proceed with the unanimous consent of the house.

Some hon. Members: Carry on.

Mr. Johnston: I shall be only a few moments, as I do not want to take advantage of the generosity of the house. I should like the members to recall that, if we are basing the amount of pension we can give to the pensioners on our ability to produce goods and services in this country—I would say that should be the only limit upon it—then, when we have had an increase in production such as the Prime Minister says, we should not be quibbling about what social services we are going to cut out if we eliminate the means test.

We further agree, Mr. Speaker, that the age should be lowered to 65, and that the wife should automatically qualify when the husband receives a pension. I believe that is self-explanatory, so I shall not take the time of the house to explain it.

A moment ago, I spoke about the initial steps that might be taken in eliminating the means test. Let there be no misunderstanding about my position. I believe the means test should be permanently abolished. I think it is a criminal thing. As a first step, we might have to apply a principle which is advocated by the Alberta pensioners society in a statement which I received the other day. I should like to put that statement on record, as I believe it has some merit. It says this:

We want the standard of living that is recognized in the Income Tax Act. That is to say the ceiling on income, in the Old Age Pensions Act for a single man over 70 years of age is \$600, but the single man over 65 years of age is exempt from income tax below income of \$1,500. The married man with wife over 70 years old in the Old Age Pensions Act has a ceiling on income of \$1,080. The married man with wife is exempt from income tax if his income is less than \$2,500. What we maintain is that the same standard of living should be recognized in both acts, and that the old age pensioners, single and married, should have their ceiling on income raised to the level of exemptions on income for single and married as in the Income Tax Act; both are based on a standard of living.

Now, Mr. Speaker, may I say that I hope when this old age pensions bill goes to the

committee it will receive the very best consideration, and will come back here embodying some of the suggestions I have already made.

Mr. Cote (Verdun-La Salle): Did I understand the hon. gentleman to say that he believes the means test will eventually have to be abolished?

Mr. Johnston: Yes.

Mr. Cote (Verdun-La Salle): So the hon. member considers that, at this time, there may be some difficulty in the way of doing that; there may have to be a levelling off before the test is abolished?

Mr. Knowles: Eventually, why not now?

Mr. Johnston: I have stressed that I am quite aware the Liberal government does not intend to remove the means test, and I believe everybody in Canada should know that. Let there be no misunderstanding about that. What I am trying to do at this time is to get as much as we can for the old age pensioners, despite this Liberal government. As the first step towards that, the very least the Liberal government should do is to recognize the income tax exemptions as the ceiling on income for old age pensioners.

Mr. Cote (Verdun-La Salle): How could the hon. member be aware of the policies of the party? I have never seen him in any of our caucuses.

Mr. Johnston: May I say to the hon. member that on one occasion the Liberals were having a caucus in the railway committee room. They even had policemen on duty there, but in all innocence I walked into that meeting. I was allowed to remain until I found out with whom I was associating, and I certainly got out.

Mr. Major: It being nearly six o'clock, may I move the adjournment of the debate?

Motion (Mr. Major) agreed to and debate adjourned.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Fournier (Hull) moved the adjournment of the house.

He said: Tomorrow we shall continue this debate.

Motion agreed to and the house adjourned at 5.45 p.m.