

*Old Age Security Act*

the poor are made to finance the destitute. When a man or woman is drowning, you cannot tear away the pitiful little stick that is held out even though you know the holder of the stick has a life preserver locked up somewhere that he will not bring out. I cannot vote against this legislation—

**An hon. Member:** Because your party won't let you.

**Mrs. MacInnis:** No, it is not because my party won't let me. I do not belong to that kind of party. It is because these elderly people, the ones in the lower group, are so hard up that you dare not take away even the little bit that is offered.

**An hon. Member:** Then it is not diabolical; it is Machiavellian.

**Mrs. MacInnis:** It may be Machiavellian, but those of us who know anything about Machiavelli know he was first cousin to the devil. This is what makes us so bitter about this legislation. Many old age pensioners do not have the full import of it yet, but some have. Rather than go over again our feelings about it, I will let some of the old age pensioners speak for themselves. I make no apology for telling the House what some of them are saying. I will tell hon. members about a woman in my riding, the wife of a veteran. She appealed to me some time ago before this legislation came along. Her husband had served overseas and had a pitifully small pension. They received war veterans allowance for a little time but were unable to do very well even with it.

Last summer this woman appealed to me. She asked, "As my Member of Parliament, can you help me? I have been told that my whole system is being poisoned because I have abscesses on all my upper teeth. If the teeth remain, I shall be poisoned completely. My stomach is in terrible shape now with ulcers, but if they take my teeth out my health will suffer because I cannot afford dentures." This woman had no resources. She could not participate in medicare. She was practically crying when she talked to me. She said, "I have never taken charity in my life, but can you help me?" I said, "I don't know, but I will try." I scrounged around and found a voluntary fund in Vancouver that was able to help her. Thanks to that voluntary organization her health was saved. She wrote me just the other day as follows:

My new dentures have been a godsend—no more throbbing, infected gums and the teeth look very nice.

I ask the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Munro) whether he is proud of the situation in our country where this woman and others like her have their pensions frozen at \$80 and are condemned to throbbing, infected gums and poisoned stomachs. Here is another letter from my riding:

I am writing this morning about my old age pension which isn't enough for me to live on when prices are going up all the time on everything we have to buy. So, I would like to see it raised another ten dollars. I might be able to get by on that. Hoping to hear from you soon.

[Mrs. MacInnis.]

What am I going to tell her, Mr. Minister—that her pension is to be frozen at \$80 and that the escalator clause providing 2 per cent according to the cost of living will be cut out? That is what she will learn for Christmas. Here is another letter which I received:

I think the old age pension is away below what a normal person needs. It is an injustice for Parliament to expect the older citizens to live with dignity on this low amount. Therefore, I am asking you as the member representing us in the House that on all questions regarding this you vote to improve their miserable existence.

Here is another:

As a taxpayer for over 40 years I feel it is time that our government spent a bit of money on us senior citizens. We are finding it very difficult to live on \$79 per month, and since my husband receives a small pension of \$65 we are not eligible for the supplement income. Therefore, we have to pay for all our medicine—over \$300 per year—pay medical insurance, etc.

Our rent has been increased and the price of food is going up—in spite of Hon. Ron Basford and his teddy bears.

I guess she forgot about Hon. Ron Basford and his peanut butter. The peanut butter has come down, it seems.

There seems to be an abundance of money for all sorts of royal commissions, salaries, etc., and we are very concerned about the small amount which we are forced to exist on.

Can you do something to help us?

Mr. Minister, is this the best you can do for this woman and thousands like her in this country? Here is another letter:

● (5:40 p.m.)

As an old age pensioner, I would like to draw to the attention of the various levels of government of this country our desperate plight. I feel our dollar value is putting us in the "poverty bracket".

I would like to see some help such as: increase the tax exemptions for retirees over 65 to \$3,000, and free health services such as free drugs and an increase in the old age pension itself to meet the ever-increasing cost of living. The dollar has eroded to the point where my small savings, which at one time seemed adequate, have long been going down to nil.

Would appreciate it if you would work for us all in your capacity as an MP toward this goal. We have a great country, and pioneers should be given some consideration.

If we can find money for commissions, boards, Members of Parliament, Senators and things like the *Bona-venture*, why can we not find money for these pensioners? I do not only hear from people in my own riding. Here is a letter from Montreal:

I am appealing to you on behalf of the old age pensioners. The government should give \$150 a month to the pensioners. Last year the government gave them an increase of 2 per cent, when the cost of living has gone up 20 per cent to 25 per cent. No one can exist on \$110 a month. My rent is \$110 a month. Then I have phone and gas and electric, a charwoman once in a while. So you see how much I have left for food. In 1929, before the break in the market, I had a nice home, a country home, a car, a servant.

This writer is better off than the average.

My family used to go to Europe. I had a nice business. Three years later the bank took over and sold me out completely. I