

Old Age Security Act

Mr. Speaker, when both spouses are 65, when they live in their own home or apartment, \$285 is a very reasonable amount.

But where there is lack of consistency and even of plain common sense is when one of them is 65 and the other 60, 62, 63 or 64, in which case only \$150 is paid for both. Why assess the pension for one couple aged 65 at \$285 and the pension for another couple, one of which is 65 and the other 64, at \$150?

Mr. Speaker, it does not make sense. That is why we have brought the matter up so often, even submitting amendments to deal with it. We even at one time, proposed a motion which was debated in this House, but unfortunately defeated.

Mr. Speaker, we are not demanding anything fantastic or miraculous. What we are calling for is plain common sense. Someone could retort: Then it is up to provincial governments to look after those who have not reached the age of 65. Of course we agree with that.

But upon looking closely at the criteria applied, for instance in the province of Quebec, we find they are below decency level, they are actually not pensions, but pittance. And for two persons who have not reached age 65, the Quebec government through the Social Affairs Department grants on the average only \$130 or \$140. These are the criteria in Quebec.

• (1230)

Therefore, two persons of 64 receive presently from the Quebec Social Affairs Department about \$135 or \$140, and at 65, they will draw \$285. This gap is tremendous; in fact, the amount is then doubled.

As representatives of the people, we are made aware every day of scores of cases involving people who have not enough money to pay for their food, electricity and telephone. They come and ask us to plead with welfare officials, asking them to improve their standards of living.

On June 16, 1971, I wrote to the Quebec Minister of Social Affairs, Mr. Claude Castonguay, a letter clearly showing the ambiguous and illogical situation which prevails presently. I quote:

Dear sir:

You are no doubt receiving numerous letters to protest against the changes made in your department last fall. All those who find their cheques reduced, sometimes cut out altogether, become angry, frustrated and sometimes more sick than they were before.

I also wish to protest. You will, however, allow me to do so in a positive and constructive way by offering one suggestion.

We are still in the same country, as far as I know, if on different sides of the Ottawa river. Why then not accept as a vital minimum what the federal government grants as old age security pension and guaranteed income supplement.

A married couple, aged 65, is entitled to \$255 per month. That is at the present time a decent minimum. Your department allows about \$130 to two persons under 65 and without any income. Values in Quebec are different from those in Ottawa.

This pruning game in which your regional offices are indulging aggravates the poor people on welfare, all the more so because they seem to be received off-handedly when they are not simply thrown out or, still, they are refused an interview. Being poor and out of work is hard enough without adding the insult of a bureaucrat urging a middle age widow, for instance, to "look after herself". Why all these insulting investigations, these nosy checkings, these unaccountable delays when the only thing to do is to check

income tax returns, something which should be made compulsory anyway?

Hoping that my comments will help you I remain

Yours truly,

M.P. for Champlain.

Mr. Speaker, I took the trouble to read this letter addressed to the Quebec minister in order to show you how much we want to close those gaps. In 1968, there was a great deal of talk about a just society. Is it fair that a married couple of 60, 61, 62, 63 or 64 cannot live with \$130 a month, when it is acknowledged that from now on, the vital minimum will be of \$285 at 65? Is there any justice in this? I shall be told that this is a provincial matter and that Quebec has only to increase its social welfare allowances. I agree, but the two government levels should show enough understanding to co-ordinate all their efforts along the same line.

I realize that the reactions of the Quebec Premier, Mr. Bourassa, and Minister of Social Affairs, Mr. Castonguay, were directly related to the letter which I read a few minutes ago. And this is how we are once more getting involved in a useless dispute and in such ambiguous situations that we are wondering where they will lead us.

I should like at this point to quote the comments of the Quebec Premier, Mr. Bourassa, on last Monday's budget statement, as published in *La Presse* on Wednesday, May 10, 1972. I quote:

Quebecers aged 65 and over may welcome the Turner budget but it is going to create a serious problem for the provincial government with respect to those aged 64 and less who will not benefit from Ottawa's new gifts in a field of joint jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, those, clearly are the words of the Premier of Quebec. So there is a problem. It comes from lack of co-ordination between the two levels of government. I do not mean by that the government is not justified in increasing pensions, but that the government is wrong not to co-operate better with the parties involved. It might have solved the problem by accepting our suggestion that the pensionable age be brought down to 60 and that it be granted automatically to the spouse when one of them reaches the specified age.

Of course, Mr. Speaker, Mr. Castonguay's reaction was in the same vein. May I quote again from *La Presse* of Friday, May 10:

Income Security Policy Unachievable

I am quoting from Mr. Castonguay's text.

The announcement, in Monday's federal budget, of new fiscal and monetary benefits granted to elderly people is, in our view, proof that it is apparently impossible to achieve an income security policy as consistent as was required, integrated, and permitting a fair distribution of resources.

How is it that no thought was given to avoid such things? It is due, Mr. Speaker, to the haste, on the eve of a general election, to distribute more money in order to earn votes. I see no other reason. Why allow this further bickering between different levels of government? I shall again quote Mr. Castonguay when he stresses—

Mr. Albert Béchard (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Justice): Mr. Speaker—