

Old Age Security Act Amendment

● (10:20 p.m.)

I referred to the Liberal member for Brantford when he was in the chamber. I am sorry he is not here now. He spoke on this matter a while ago and again recently. I wish to commend him for his second speech against a means test. If the minister finds it difficult to listen to our arguments, surely he will accept the views of the hon. member for Brantford in view of the fact that he sits in close proximity to the Minister of National Health and Welfare. The hon. member is not sitting close to the minister now but is in contact with him.

Reference was made previously to a public opinion poll taken at the booth of the Toronto area retired workers' council at the Canadian National Exhibition in Toronto. I wish to put the results of that poll on the record once again. The question was: Do you believe the basic old age security pension should be increased from \$75 to \$100 a month and without a means test? The answer was "yes" in 90 per cent of the cases. I think this represents the general view across the country. I have not been out west for a while but the letters I have received show that this represents the general view in that part of the country.

Our centennial year is fast approaching, and I make this final plea. Every effort should be made by the government to honour our senior citizens, who built up this country, and pay them at least part of what they deserve for their contribution to this great nation.

Mr. Donald MacInnis (Cape Breton South): Mr. Speaker, reference has been made this evening to the MacEachern test. I am wondering whether the minister would take it upon himself to send the expert, and I qualify the word "expert", on his personal staff to Cape Breton, back home so to speak, in order that he may assess the situation there. Of course the minister realizes I am talking about Mr. Bill McEachern who was on the minister's personal staff and obtained national prominence a few years ago for subsisting on the old age pension. The minister will recall Mr. McEachern's series of articles which was carried in the Toronto newspapers and at that time received a great deal of favourable comment. I wonder whether the minister would take the trouble to send Mr. McEachern back home so that he could familiarize himself with the situation in the minister's constituency and other areas throughout Nova Scotia and Cape Breton.

I understand that the minister said this plan will benefit some 900,000 persons. Some people have indicated the number will go as high

as 1,200,000. I ask the minister, in what category has he placed the miners of Cape Breton? The minister realizes that the miners receive—I cannot refer to it as a pension—a gratuity from Dosco upon retirement. He is also aware that every miner since 1952 who has qualified for old age security has had that gratuity reduced by \$42 or \$45. The company is in a position to cut off the gratuity completely at any time. Since the company has used the argument—I am going back to 1952—that they are paying 2 per cent of income toward old age security and since on the basis of paying this 2 per cent they are allowed to cut off the advances in old age security, has the minister received any assurance whatsoever from Dosco that they will continue paying the gratuity?

The minister is aware that by 1975 the Dosco gratuity will be phased out completely as far as the work force is concerned. Has the minister any knowledge whatsoever of the situation of the miners already pensioned off and receiving the gratuity? Does he know whether they will continue to receive the gratuity? This is another reason why I suggest that the minister might send his expert, Mr. McEachern, to that part of the country, and I say this in all sincerity. Mr. McEachern could go to Cape Breton and Inverness and prepare a detailed report for the minister in respect of the formula he is introducing now and the old age security increases that will be brought about.

I have listened with great interest to hon. members who have spoken this evening. I am glad to see that the hon. member for Brantford (Mr. Brown) is in the chamber. The conscience of hon. members opposite has urged them to try to explain why they took a stand against an amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition (Mr. Diefenbaker) at the beginning of this session to provide a pension of \$100 a month for the elderly people of this country. Hon. members opposite have been squirming about their stand ever since. I may say to the hon. member for Brantford that he is nothing less than dishonest or stupid.

An hon. Member: Nobody is taking you up on that remark.

Mr. MacInnis (Cape Breton South): I ask the hon. member for Red Deer (Mr. Thompson) to get up and try to justify the position he took on the amendment. Shortly after voting against it he rose and said he was in favour of our old age pensioners receiving \$100 a month.