

Old Age Security Act Amendment

legislation. Let us not lose sight of that. All elderly people have earned this pension by the work they have put into this country in their working years. They have a right to receive it when they reach the proper age. Now, only some of them will get this increase.

The excuse of the government, putting it briefly is: Why give this bonus to millionaires? Why give it to those who do not need it?

An hon. Member: Right.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): Right? Wrong, I say.

An hon. Member: Right.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): That is wrong, and I will say why. We have in our hands the machinery for recovering not only part, but all the old age pension payments from those people who do not need them.

If the present income tax legislation cannot retrieve all the pension from those who do not need it, we shall be the first to strengthen the income tax legislation to retrieve what is not needed. When you consider that since 1961 the top 20 per cent of our people have received 42½ per cent of our national income, while the bottom 20 per cent have received only 4½ per cent of our national income, it is high time we retrieved a little of what is needed for old age pensions from that 20 per cent of our population which has been receiving the 42½ per cent of our income. Those of us who have to pay will be exceedingly glad to help the old people. We shall be glad not to take the wherewithal away from people who can ill afford to lose it. We shall be glad to make the new pensions available to our old people, especially to those who need the increase.

The real reason for the government's action is not that it fears this pension will go to those who do not need it; the real reason for its action is that this government is not prepared to give the money to the people that they ought to have when they reach the age of 65, or whatever it is. I believe the age this year is 67.

An hon. Member: A lie.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): It is not a lie, it is the truth.

An hon. Member: It is a lie; rot.

Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway): It is not a lie, and it is not rot. It is the absolute truth that this government has the wrong priorities when it comes to the old people of this

[Mrs. MacInnis (Vancouver-Kingsway).]

country. We feel that instead of spending the kind of money they are spending on less essential services, and defence is a good example, this government should spend it on the old people who have reached the stage where they are entitled to a pension, with no questions asked.

There is another reason for my alarm in seeing the undermining of universality in the old age pension legislation. Once the government gets the habit of undermining universality, the next thing to go will be medicare. We shall be getting amendments to medicare very shortly which will mean that only those people who are needy, who fall into the lowest category, will be considered in the new medicare legislation when it comes into effect. This mentality of applying the means test to people—whether that means test is applied by the authorities or by the old age pensioners themselves enforcing the regulations—is catching. I, for one, do not want to see this mentality growing.

I believe that money is not the only important thing, and I believe that more than mere money is at stake here. Those of us who watched the right to the universal old age pension won back in 1961, after the long years that went into that fight, realize how much the old people rose in status when they got their pension as of right. Before the old age pension first came, the old people used to have to drag their children before the courts to have the courts declare that their children could not support them, before getting charity from the municipality. That was before the old age pension was paid. I want to point out that the means test mentality is fatal, because if that mentality prevails we shall see bit by bit the dignity of the elderly people do down the drain. It will be dignity on the dole. Others may believe in it, but I do not. We are asked to sanction dignity on the dole. A number of us will not do that, because we do not believe in dignity on the dole.

Some hon. members may say: "But you will vote for this measure as you voted for the resolution the other day." That is quite right. After having fought to the best of our ability we shall vote as we voted the other day, because we shall not dare to do otherwise. We dare not refuse, on behalf of the needy, the few cents that this government is prepared to give them. Though we shall not vote differently, we shall fight to the limit of our ability to get the legislation approved in the way we want it approved.