

a result, they find themselves unable to build up their pensions to the extent they wish. Progress is needed in all these areas, and I do not think it can be achieved by sending the bill back to committee. Rather, a complete program of revision is needed. At this point, the most we can do for our senior citizens is to pass the bill, such as it is, and make its benefits available as soon as possible.

I tell the House again that a great many senior citizens are waiting for the benefits of this legislation to become available in April. Anyone in this House who feels this is not the case has only to go home and talk to the people who are waiting for this additional money. I therefore urge the House to expedite passage of the bill and to make this additional money available to the senior citizens.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. Eudore Allard (Rimouski): Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to take too much of the time of the House. I am also aware of the fact that it is necessary to have this bill passed.

In the Speech from the Throne, the government gave many hopes to the people aged 60 to 65. With the introduction of Bill C-147, 98 per cent of those hopes have vanished along with the fine promises in the Speech from the Throne.

I will not delay the adoption of the bill because crumbs are better than nothing. I would like to point out that the proposed increase amounts only to 42.8c/ a day for the richest. For those who will receive the guaranteed income supplement, the increase works out to 65.75c/ a day.

We have 830,000 people between 60 and 65; 320,000 other people are married to people in their sixties, which, in all, accounts for over one million people.

Our currency is said to have devaluated by over 31 per cent since 1961. Considering the slight increase in the old age security pension and the lesser value of our dollar, I suggest that this increase is tantamount to crumbs and quite inadequate to meet the current and future needs of senior citizens. I also contend that this bill should take into account the spouse and eligibility for retirement at 60.

It is strange that when you meet hon. members outside the House they all seem in favour of retirement at 60 and substantially higher pensions, but as soon as they have stepped into the House, there is such a change in them that I have to assume that many intrigues are going on within the parties.

Mr. Speaker, I would conclude by expressing the hope that the government will meet our requests.

Mr. René Matte (Champlain): Mr. Speaker, having had the opportunity to co-operate with the member for Joliette (Mr. La Salle) in the presentation of this amendment, I take the liberty of refuting certain arguments brought forth by the NPD member who spoke a while ago.

I do not think that this amendment can in any way delay the passing of the bill, which could become effective on April 2, at the discretion of the minister. Indeed, in the next 24 hours, the committee could meet, the minister could be heard and simply bring all the changes we all

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consider as essential to improve the condition of the senior citizens, especially those aged 60 to 65.

Such is the purpose of this amendment, and here I do not want to depreciate my colleague from Joliette, but I wish to point out that, having suggested that amendment to him, I thought it was an excellent means to obtain what we could not get yesterday, since we tried for a good part of the day to propose amendments that could have been in order. Now, we have realized that it would have a better chance if it come from outside our party.

In any event, we hope it will go as well with the Minister of National Health and Welfare (Mr. Lalonde). And why? Simply in order to bring this debate to an end, to give satisfaction to all hon. members and to demonstrate that while co-operating with the independent member of the House, we indulge in no kind of partisanship whatsoever. And as we do know that all hon. members are in favour of lowering the age of eligibility to the old age security pension, why does not the minister simply decide to advise us right away that he will introduce within one or two months another bill to amend the Old Age Security Act, to take effect retroactively as from April 1, 1973? The thing is as simple as that!

Consequently, in order to make it impossible for my colleagues of the New Democratic Party, when called upon to vote, to say, if they vote against the amendment, that they do so not to delay the passing of this legislation, I should like to disprove in advance such an argument, because, in my opinion, those who accept to vote for this amendment will simply suggest that they are in favour of granting the pension to any citizen at 60 and automatically to any spouse as soon as the other one reaches the age of 60. A vote against this amendment is a vote against that possibility. That is the purpose we had in mind when we helped the hon. member for Joliette move this amendment.

Also, Mr. Speaker, I think that all hon. members have an excellent opportunity to show that it is possible to reach an understanding, to work hand in hand and accept the most legitimate and sincere wishes of the people. There is no doubt that people want the pension at 60 for all the reasons given since this debate started. I think we have to be responsible and I should like very much to see the minister assume his own responsibility. If he could tell us right now exactly what his intentions are we could pass this motion. The minister could explain to us how he could amend the bill since this motion bids him to do so.

I conclude my remarks by saying that I hope all hon. members will vote in favour of this amendment for the greatest benefit of the people.

Mr. Gilbert Rondeau (Shefford): Mr. Speaker, I will not make a speech but I want to give the minister the opportunity to answer the question asked by the hon. member for Champlain (Mr. Matte). Is he prepared to make a statement in the House right now to the effect that he will introduce another bill before the end of 1973 to lower the retirement age and to grant the old age security pension at 60, so that the hon. members will know where matters stand and will be in a better position to support that bill. Thus, the minister would himself help accelerate the passage of the bill and could assure the hon. members that he