

Old Age Security Act Amendment

have. However, I do not accept that argument. I believe that the senior citizens by and large, in 98 or 99 per cent of the cases, will report accurately whatever the regulations call for. But they can make a mistake. As has been pointed out, our senior citizens, about whom we have been talking this evening, the potential recipients of these payments, are all over 65 years of age and in all cases their standards of education and understanding of these forms are not up to the level of people who have the educational standards of today. Therefore it is possible for them to make a mistake, and some of these mistakes can be disastrous.

If all a pensioner has is \$75 or \$105 a month and he has to pay back money to the treasury because of some mistake on the part of the department, it can be disastrous to him. Therefore I hope the minister and his administrative staff will be very charitable in applying the law under clause 20 of this bill. I know of cases in my constituency where repayments of this kind have created severe hardship. After some negotiation with the Department of National Revenue it has been possible to reduce the monthly repayment to as low as \$5 or \$10 a month. But even this is too much when a reassessment of the individual's financial circumstances indicates that there is no other source than the pension cheque from which to take the money. If the pensioner has cash or other assets the amount is recovered from this source, but if there are no such assets and the repayments are taken from his pension, this constitutes a penalty on the pensioner. The apparent concept of the guaranteed minimum income is that every citizen shall have at least \$105 a month, which shall be no less for any reason whatsoever. Therefore these attachments defeat the principle and the concept outlines in the minimum income program. As I said, I hope the minister will be charitable in collecting from those senior citizens who have made a mistake in filling out their forms, if any such recoveries are necessary.

● (9:20 p.m.)

Finally I wish to say that the bill is a step in the right direction. We believe that \$75 a month cannot and should not be considered the maximum universal old age security pension. At the same time we have to recognize that only the government is responsible for this legislation and has the authority to introduce a bill raising the ceiling. They have chosen not to do so. They have chosen to bring in as a substitute a guaranteed minimum income of up to \$105 a month for those

who qualify under the Old Age Security Act. Therefore while there is nothing that anyone in the opposition can do to change this decision, because under our rules a minister of the Crown must move such an amendment to a bill, we hope that the minister was not correct when he said on December 5 that this legislation will take care of the situation until the Canada Pension Plan becomes applicable to everyone, or over the next ten years after which this legislation will be phased out.

We look to this government, or whatever government is holding office, to raise the universal old age security payments in keeping with the increased productivity of the country. If we ask for anything less we will not be doing justice to our senior citizens. I also suggest that simply to raise old age security pensions so as to cover only the increased cost of living from year to year will not be enough because as the standard of living goes up owing to increased productivity our senior citizens should reap the benefits as well as everyone else.

I wish to say again to the minister that I hope he will be charitable in the application of the income test and that if mistakes are made as the plan first comes into effect those people who may get a few dollars to which they are not strictly entitled under the provisions of the act will not be dealt with too harshly. As I said at the outset, we intend to support the bill but we do not consider it to be the last increase. We hope there will be a further justifiable increase in the Old Age Security Act.

Mr. J. E. Brown (Brantford): Mr. Speaker, I should like to make a few remarks on the second reading of the bill. I need not remind the house of the work I have done in an effort to have the Old Age Security Act amended in order that the monthly payments to old age pensioners be increased to \$100 a month without a means test. I have not been very successful in my efforts but I have been successful in urging the government to go as far as to introduce this bill.

However, I know one thing for sure, namely, that in my fight for an increase in old age pensions without a means test I have the support of an overwhelming majority of the people of Brantford, Ontario. I find that a good many of them have doubts about the effectiveness of the bill to establish a supplement to the old age pension. Last Saturday one man said to me that no one has said how much it will cost to enforce the provisions of the bill and how much will have to be paid