

Old Age Security Act

program will release some of this talent, and mobilize it for community development, it will be one of the best programs we have ever seen brought forward in this House.

The bill before us today, Mr. Speaker, will substantially improve the lot of almost 2 million Canadians, 2 million of our most valued citizens. It does this not only through immediate lump sum increases in the guaranteed income supplement, but also by providing regular increases to compensate for the ravages of inflation. I commend the House on the spirit of co-operation shown between the various political parties to see this bill passed so that the benefits may be paid as soon as possible. I hope this spirit will continue so that the benefits may be in the hands of those who have made such an outstanding contribution to our country by the end of next month.

• (1450)

Mr. Randolph Harding (Kootenay West): Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to take too much of the time of the House this afternoon as we are rather anxious to see this bill get through the House today, but I feel I should say a few words on Bill C-207, an act to amend the Old Age Security Act. This bill will receive my support as it incorporates a principle for which we have been fighting for many years. This principle is that the actual cost of living increase be added to the basic pension every year. This yearly addition to the pension will at least maintain the purchasing power of the pension and will be welcomed by our senior citizens. I might add, Mr. Speaker, that the increases in the guaranteed income supplements are also needed and welcomed by the members of this House and, I am sure, by the old age pensioners who receive them.

I should like to take this opportunity, however, to express my disappointment at the failure of the government to increase the basic old age security pension. There is no reason why a very substantial increase could not have been enacted by the legislation before us. This government talks about a just society and about priorities; in my opinion adequate living standards which are certainly tied in closely with income, should be a top priority in any just society. Adequate income standards for our senior citizens, who pioneered in every part of our nation and who have laid the very economic base upon which we depend today, certainly should be at the top of the list of priorities. This was not evident in the budget brought down by the Minister of Finance (Mr. Turner) on May 8.

The pension case for the New Democratic Party has been ably placed before this House by the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles). I fully endorse the remarks he made earlier in this debate. There are, however, several points about which I would like to speak briefly as they say that repetition is the mother of learning.

The points I should like to deal with very briefly, Mr. Speaker, are those which illustrate the need for an immediate increase in the basic old age security pension to \$150 a month and the need to amend the Income Tax Act in order to give these pensioners tax exemptions of at least \$3,000 for a single person and \$4,500 for married couples. In addition, I should like to speak about the future of the old age security pension. I believe that this

[Mr. Foster.]

pension should have an automatic escalator clause built into it. Prior to today we were always asking for part of this escalator clause to include a cost of living index, but another factor should be built into it, namely, consideration of the increasing gross national product. I do not think this can be done every year, Mr. Speaker, but certainly senior citizens who live in Canada are entitled to the benefits of the increasing productivity of our nation. There could be a very simple amendment made to the act to indicate that if the gross national product of Canada increased by a certain percentage a year or over two years, there would be an automatic increase to the pensioners living in Canada. This sharing of our gross national product is something to which I feel this government should pay more attention than it has in the past. We know that as far as pensioners are concerned, the sharing of the gross national product or the increasing prosperity of the Canadian nation is not taken into consideration.

May I return to the matter of the basic pension? I should like to point out that we have received a large number of communications from organizations all across Canada. These are organizations of senior citizens and deal with their problems. There is no doubt that senior citizens from one end of Canada to the other are, for the most part, in need of a sharp increase in the basic pension. The cost of living has been going up and there are many other costs which increase as we get older. There are things around the home where we have to depend more than ever on other individuals, such as home repairs. All this adds up to a need for more income for pensioners. There is no doubt that our nation is able to pay a basic old age security pension of \$150 a month. We can do it. I am suggesting to the government that they look very seriously at this aspect of the Old Age Security legislation and see if they cannot come up with a substantial increase to grant at least part of the \$150 amount which pension organizations and members of this House have been requesting.

There is one other point I wish to make before I sit down, Mr. Speaker. Tied in to all this, the increase in the basic pension, the protection of the income of our senior citizens by raising the amount on which they will pay no income tax and the establishment of a proper built-in pension which will include the increasing gross national product of the nation, the government should give consideration to lowering the pensionable age to 60. This is long overdue. I suggest that for a start this not be made a compulsory retirement age but individuals could be given the option of retiring at 60 and receiving the old age security pension. I trust that the minister and the government will look very seriously at this suggestion. It has been raised by a number of members in this House and as time goes on, especially with the extremely high unemployment which we see in our nation, groups and individuals are beginning to realize that we should be moving along these lines.

Mr. Speaker, I am not going to take any more of the time of the House. I can assure you that while we welcome the legislation before us we feel it has not gone far enough. Our group will continue to press for what we consider to be some basic reforms in this pension legislation. We serve warning on the government that whether we are back here for another session before the next election or return when the election is over, that our